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ABSTRACT

This booklet discusses the importance of involving members of the community in public school programs and activities and presents brief profiles of current school programs and policies that are attempting to do so. The author examines in detail the kinds and extent of parent and community interaction with the schools and describes what different schools throughout the country are doing to encourage active, constructive community participation. Separate chapters of the booklet provide guidelines for 1) breaking down barriers to parent participation; 2) organizing a volunteer program; 3) involving the community in problem solving, long-range planning, goal setting, and evaluation; 4) working with advisory committees; 5) working with special interest groups; and 6) identifying critical community issues, such as decentralization, school closings, and collective bargaining. (Author/JG)

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Acknowledgment

Linking Schools and the Community is one of a series of Education U.S.A. Special Reports on current trends in school policies and programs. The purpose of the series is to provide school practitioners at all levels, and others concerned with education, with the most up-to-date information on issues at the core of today's constantly changing education scene.

Linking Schools and the Community was written by Peggy Odell Gonder. It was developed and produced by the Education U.S.A. Special Reports staff: Anne C. Lewis, Executive Editor; Cynthia C. Menand, Director of Editorial Services; and John H. Wherry, Editorial Director. Special research, editorial and production services were provided by Janet Eaffy, Debbie Lueckese and Jenny McAllister.

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Overview

Education is too important to leave to the professionals.

Lee McMurrin
Superintendent, Milwaukee Public Schools

Citizen participation in education is not a new idea. In fact, as America was being settled, citizens **were** the schools—because each family educated its own children. When towns formed, school matters were handled at a town meeting, with each parent and citizen having a direct vote. As communities grew, responsibility for running the schools was transferred to elected officials. Although each parent and community member was no longer directly involved, communities were still small enough that individual opinions could be heard. In addition, rural Americans of the 18th and 19th centuries shared common values, so elected officials were likely to reflect the wishes of the community.

The educational picture began changing in the 20th century, and each new development served to isolate school governance from the community. First, in the name of efficiency, school districts began consolidating. According to the U.S. Dept. of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW), the number of school districts was reduced from 110,000 in 1900 to 16,000 by 1974. The population increased while the number of school boards decreased, so each succeeding school board member represented a larger number of constituents. HEW estimates that the school board member of 1900 represented about 138 people, while the board member of 1974 represented about 2,470 people.

As the schools grew larger, they became more complicated. Details of day-to-day operation became too time consuming for lay school board members, so administrators were hired to design programs and make recommendations on educational policy. Today, many education critics charge that it is administrators—and not the elected school boards—who run the schools. Decisions recommended by professional administrators sometimes run counter to the wishes of the community. In some places, classroom walls have been removed to create open space schools at the

suggestion of administrators—only to have citizens insist that the walls be reinstalled a few years later.

The power of school boards—and the lay public at large—has been further eroded by the advent of collective bargaining and the growth of teacher unions. In addition to teacher salaries and fringe benefits, collective bargaining agreements have spread to include a growing number of educational policy issues because they affect teacher working conditions. And in most communities, the collective bargaining process is conducted in private—leaving citizens no voice in the determination of policies.

Enter the Citizen

Citizen participation in the schools began its comeback in the mid-1960s with the creation of federal programs like Title I and Head Start. In order to receive federal funds, each school had to create a parent advisory council to assist in the planning, implementation and evaluation of these programs. School officials rediscovered that parents, with training, could make positive contributions to these programs. The low-income parents who were involved gained self esteem because their opinions were sought and respected. The self esteem, in turn, positively affected their children—who performed better in school.

The success of federally-funded advisory groups encouraged the formation of advisory committees for other purposes. District-level advisory committees were created for tasks ranging from closing schools to planning new programs to suggesting budget cuts. Advisory committees at individual schools gave input to principals on a variety of subjects and fostered a two-way flow of communication between the community and the school.

Citizen participation through volunteerism has also grown. New teaching styles which individualize instruction have encouraged the use of tutors and classroom aides. The career education movement has brought hundreds of business executives, craftspeople and professionals into classrooms as enrichment resources. Volunteers working in libraries, school offices and cafeterias have provided valuable help when strained budgets did not permit hiring additional employes. Such volunteers, who are able to see positive things happening in the schools, can also become valuable ambassadors for the schools.

Citizen participation in the schools is developed most fully through the concept of community education. The concept is based on the belief that the schools belong to the community and that learning can occur outside the classroom. To more fully serve the community, such schools employ a community education coordinator who works with the city and

other public and private agencies to coordinate all cultural, recreational, educational and vocational services. The coordinator works with local school councils to determine their needs, then refers persons to existing programs or helps create a program if one is needed. At a community school, a high school student may spend the afternoon in an office internship, while an adult studies at the school to earn a diploma. The central premise of community education is the democratic principle that persons who are to be served should have a voice in determining the service.

Why Involve the Community?

Many principals and superintendents shy away from involving the community because they feel they will lose power. Surprisingly, administrators have found just the opposite is true: advisory groups enhance power by giving the added support of the community to administrators' recommendations. *Schools Where Parents Make a Differnce,* by Don Davies, describes the cooperative relationship enjoyed by Los Angeles elementary principal Winifred Fischer and her school's advisory group. "The council is creative, stimulating and has allowed the school to move ahead faster," Fischer said. "The district sees that the council is backing me and I am able to move twice as fast as before."

Milwaukee Supt. Lee McMurrin has learned that advisory groups provide an administrator with antennae into the community that can warn of potential problems before they reach the explosive point. Such groups also provide feedback to determine how to deal with these problems. On a similar note, Cleveland Supt. Paul Briggs says the active involvement of responsible citizens reduces the effectiveness of extremists. "We had a preacher who was trying to burn books," Briggs recalls. "I told him we respect the parents' decisions on textbooks and that he should go talk to them. We had no more trouble with him," Briggs added.

Barriers to Involvement

Citizen involvement has many advantages, but that doesn't mean it is easy. That was the message sent by many *Education U.S.A.* readers in response to a mail survey for this report. Among other questions, the readers were asked to list any barriers to citizen participation in their schools. The answer most frequently given was lack of time, due to job commitments by both parents. Others mentioned apathy or other attitudinal barriers, such as "You're the professional." For Sophia Perry,

information director for White Plains (N.Y.) Public Schools, the challenge of citizen involvement is "finding ways to convince capable people that participation is worthwhile; that their time is well spent; that citizen views do make a difference; and that citizen involvement is a key component of a good educational system."

Lance Fanshaw of Palmyra, Wis., said continued interest was sometimes a problem in the face of a slow school decision-making process. And large distances can be a barrier in a rural school district. Vedith Teesdale-Smith, a middle school principal from Purcellville, Va., wrote that the elementary schools that send most of her students cover a wide geographic area—resulting in "a lack of feeling for the (middle) school as a part of the community."

The most formidable barrier mentioned by survey respondents was a lack of leadership to support the concept of citizen participation. The feeling was best expressed by a junior high school principal from Missouri:

> This district has financial problems. Programs are being cut back; administrators are being cut back. Most of us just don't have the time. We feel that we owe some time to ourselves and to our families. We average about nine hours a day at the present time. Most administrators feel that an additional two or three hours in community involvement without any encouragement or incentive from the superintendent and board of education is futile.

Leadership can also be a problem for the principal whose superintendent superficially supports citizen involvement, but who actually wants to control the outcome of advisory committee recommendations. This principal is faced with the choice of structuring the committee in a way that subverts the process or taking the risk of angering the "boss."

The importance of good leadership for community involvement is underscored by Carl Marburger, senior associate of the National Committee for Citizens in Education. Marburger says elected school councils are likely to be more effective than appointed ones, but that neither consideration was as important as leadership. "You need to provide leadership, but you don't need to control what happens," he advises. "Citizen involvement is a process. You need to set a mechanism with parameters. Unless the school administrator sets the process in motion, meaningful involvement won't happen."

Chapter 1.

Communication Is the Key

We must build good personal relationships with parents. Mothers and fathers must know their child's teacher; the teacher must know the parents. Strangers cannot communicate. Strangers seldom feel trust and confidence. Distance does not lead to enchantment; it only breeds suspicion.

James L. Hymes Jr.,
Journal of Research & Development in Education

If interaction between the school and community is to be meaningful and fruitful, it must be based on trust. That trust can only develop through openness and two-way communication on a continuing basis. Such two-way communication must take place at all levels of a school system. At the classroom level, two-way communication is fostered through parent-teacher conferences, home visits, "happy calls" and personal notes. At the school building level, principals can build ties through coffees and lunches with small groups of parents or students and through an open door policy on school visitation. Two-way communication is also possible at the district level—through advisory committees, newsletters and community surveys.

Parent-Teacher Communication

A parent's attitude about the entire school system is bound to be influenced by the the parent's relationship to the child's teacher. The best communication happens face to face, when both parties can **see** as well as **hear** what the other person is saying.

The South Carolina Education Assn. and its Union County affiliate developed a series of recommendations for fostering a positive relation-

ship between parents and teachers. The suggestions were published in the National Education Assn. newsletter, *NEA Now:*

- Use the person-to-person approach. Telephone parents early in the school year to say something positive about the child and to welcome them to the school community. This is bound to make both parents and students feel good, and it might make parents more approachable when you have to contact them about a problem. Encourage parents to visit school and to participate in activities designed for them.

- If you have the time, visit the homes of your students during the first few weeks of school. (This is most feasible at the elementary school level.) This should be entirely voluntary on the part of teachers, unless school districts provide time off during the year for home visits. Such visits are an effective first step in involving parents in the child's learning activities and progress. They also help teachers discover situations and attitudes in the home that affect the child's ability to learn.

- Solicit input from parents about your instructional program. In some schools, teachers send home questionnaires asking parents to react to different aspects of classroom activities. This gives parents a sense of involvement and gives teachers an idea about how parents view the class. This could also serve as a good "early warning" system to prevent unpleasant run-ins with parents.

- Write personalized notes or use "success cards"—which could easily be developed at low cost by the school—to relay something positive about each student to parents. If cards are sent to only a couple of parents a week, this activity would not be a burden on teachers.

- Solicit parent volunteers for the classroom. Teachers could also push the school or district to set up parent advisory committees for certain programs, classrooms, or for the achievement of specific school or curriculum objectives.

How to Keep Parents Involved

- Maintain good person-to-person relations. Don't make personal contact a one-shot deal.

- Keep written communications personal. There's nothing like a stiff, impersonal note from their child's teacher to make parents feel like outsiders. A personal note about the child's progress can take the coldness from printed report cards.

- Be aware of the pet peeves of parents. In your dealings with parents and other citizens, listen for "silent" complaints. Many parents who have complaints about their child's teachers or school never express them to school people, but air peeves to friends and neighbors—to the obvious detriment of the school.

- Make sure homework assignments are clear and have a definite and valid purpose. Homework is the biggest continuing contact between the school and the home and can create or reinforce positive or negative feelings about schools and teachers. Many schools now distribute to parents folders on homework policy, with suggestions on what parents should and should not do in helping their children with homework.

- In a classroom parent volunteer program, it is important that the teacher and the volunteers work out **together** the operations and procedures and decide who does what and when.

- When involving parents in advisory committees, make sure meetings are structured so time is not wasted. Seek parent input on real issues. Don't waste parents' time by lecturing them and don't deal with trivia—that's the fastest way to get them uninvolved and turned off to the school.

Parent-Teacher Conferences

Another meaningful way to involve parents in their child's education is to schedule parent-teacher conferences periodically throughout the year. The face to face meeting allows the teacher to give the parent more information than is possible on written report cards. Comments can include not only academic progress but social skills, like how the child relates to other children. The conference also gives the parent an opportunity to share information with the teacher that can be helpful in evaluating the child. When such exchanges are open and cordial, parents and teachers can work together both at home and school to resolve behavioral or academic problems.

Successful parent conferences require advance preparation on the part

of both parent and teacher. The parent should come to the conference with specific questions. Ideally, both parents should attend and young children should be left at home. If one parent cannot come, the attending parent should check to see what questions the other would like answered.

The answers to these questions will give parents insights into the abilities and teaching philosophies of their child's teacher. It will also communicate to the teacher that the parent is interested in his or her child's achievement and is willing to help. And a positive approach will more than likely be reflected favorably in the teacher's attitude towards the child in class. In asking questions, parents should be careful not to sound accusing or threatening. Although parent-teacher conferences supposedly are called to evaluate the child's progress, often the parent and teacher will each feel they are the one being evaluated by the other.

Teachers should prepare a report of a student's progress, being careful to include something positive about each one. To reduce student apprehension, teachers should explain the purpose of the conferences to their classes, with an emphasis on how the conference can benefit the student, the parent and the teacher. Writing in the *New Jersey Education Assn. Review*, former teacher Florine Gardella advises teachers to "respect the parent's role (in the child's education) like you expect them to respect yours."

Gardella also suggests giving parents some responsibilities and asking for their help in solving problems. A group conference for parents whose children have the same problem can be psychologically reassuring for the parents, while allowing the teacher an opportunity to give the same suggestions to many families at once. Gardella's three most important bits of advice were: "Listen, be flexible and put yourself in the place of the parent. If you can do this, you'll never send a parent home crying."

Conference Scheduling

Conscientious teachers who schedule parent-teacher conferences are sometimes frustrated by seemingly apathetic parents who refuse to attend. Sometimes parents' reasons are valid. Many working parents are not able to come to school during working hours but would be willing to meet with the teacher at other times.

Other parents, of course, **are** apathetic, but there are ways to reach them too. For some districts, the answer has been to schedule conferences in lieu of report cards at the elementary level. Mahomet, Ill., Supt. Fred A. Dale wrote *Education U.S.A.* that parent-teacher conferences

in kindergarten through the fifth grade, which are used instead of report cards, "are almost 100% attended by one or both parents."

The Central Bucks County (Pa.) School District is one that alternates teacher conferences with a detailed written report for elementary children. There are four reporting periods in the district, and teachers had been writing detailed reports for each child each time. A district-wide committee of parents and teachers reviewed the reporting process and decided the written progress reports were becoming an overwhelming task.

At the committee's suggestion, elementary teachers now hold conferences at the end of the first and third reporting periods. The detailed reports are written only at the end of the second and fourth reporting periods. Conferences are scheduled between noon and 8 p.m. over two days. (The evening hours are designed to be convenient for working parents.)

Parent-teacher conferences are not the only way to get a parent involved in a child's education. Richneck Elementary School in Newport News, Va., has pioneered a parents' manual that gives tips on ways parents can supplement the classroom on basic skills. According to an article in the *Newport News Times-Herald*, the manuals are issued every six weeks. The first two stress reading at home and listening skills. Topic areas were determined by polling the faculty. The first manual was written by the school reading consultant, principal and assistant principal.

"We try not to make this a burden on teachers," said Asst. Principal Patricia Yoder. "The material should be included in the lessons, not added to an already crowded day. Parents tell us they are using the material we send home and are getting results with it," she added.

The Richneck staff also prepared a list of books for suggested Christmas presents, organized a coffee meeting to discuss achievement test scores and sponsored a workshop on motor-perceptual skills to teach parents about the value of play.

Special Events

School activities that enable parents to actively participate are often the most popular and effective. That is what Millard Public Schools in Omaha, Neb., discovered when they inaugurated "Switch Day," an activity in which parents accompany their children to school in the morning and the child continues on to the parent's place of work in the afternoon. Communication Coordinator Nancy Holloran said parents are expected to take tests and do math problems right along with the kids.

Parent participation in the Eden (N.C.) City Schools is encouraged through discussion groups of parents who meet in their child's homeroom. Supt. W. C. Pressley said the meetings have proven "useful and informative, particularly for the parents of children in kindergarten through ninth grade." The meetings are sometimes combined with social occasions, such as a covered dish supper or an outing.

Breaking Down the Barriers

Several persons interviewed for this Special Report said schools must often take the initiative in encouraging involvement because many parents are uncomfortable in a school setting. Minority parents in particular often remember unpleasant aspects of their own educational experience and may be reluctant to have further contact with the schools.

A good way to begin breaking down the barriers between "officialdom" and the community is with informal meetings over food. The Frances M. Grass Junior High School in West St. Paul, Minn., hosts a "Lunch with the Principals" twice monthly. Invitations are sent to about 150 parents per month, and the parents are encouraged to bring a neighbor. Principal Lauren Hagge said between 20 and 30 parents have attended each meeting. "There is no formal agenda," Hagge wrote. "The only guideline is that we talk openly and frankly to parents." The informality and relatively small size of the group give a sense of human scale in a school of nearly 1,600 students.

The parents are pleased with the opportunity to meet, have lunch and share concerns. Hagge continued, "I am tremendously pleased with this program and would strongly encourage principals having communication problems to try it."

A different variation of the Lunch with the Principal program involves students rather than parents. Dorthy Haarmann, principal of the John Lewis Childs School in Floral Park, N.Y., invites seven students to have lunch in her office every Monday. Writing in the *Journal of the New York State School Boards Assn.*, Haarmann said the idea was developed in cooperation with the teachers, who explained the program to students and asked for volunteers.

Invitations are sent each week to seven primary, intermediate or upper grade students. Art students weave paper place mats and teachers provide a different table centerpiece each week. To reinforce the idea of a school as an integral part of the community, Haarmann often invites a prominent member of the community to the lunch. Community participants have included the mayor, fire and police chiefs, the school board president, postmaster, a bank president and the president of the local PTA.

"Discussions at lunch include nutrition, family outings, pets, favorite television programs, characters and heroes, sports, women's lib, careers and other timely topics," the article said.

Reactions of parents and teachers have been favorable, the principal noted. "Many parents remember from their own experience when the principal's office was associated with fear, apprehension and anxiety. They are pleased," Haarmann concluded, "that for their children, it is a place where an atmosphere of warmth, understanding and respect prevails."

Student Attractions

Parents who might otherwise shy away from schools will often attend a meeting where their children are the star performers. The East Liverpool (Ohio) Schools have discovered that student-prepared breakfasts

But Nobody's Ever Asked Me

The 1976 Gallup Poll of the public's attitudes toward the public schools contained a question directly related to citizen advisory committees. Each person was given a list of 20 possible school committees, plus the choices of "none" and "don't know." Persons were told they could check as many as they wished. According to *Phi Delta Kappan*, sponsor of the survey, just 10% of the respondents said they would **not** like to serve on a citizens advisory committee or could not make up their minds.

"While many of the other 90% who chose committees on which they would like to serve might find it impossible or impractical to carry out their intention," said George Gallup, "still, an extraordinary number of persons in a typical community are sufficiently interested to fill places on a score of committees." The most popular committee—chosen by nearly half the public—was "discipline and related problems." Coming in second, and chosen by nearly one-third of those polled, was "student/teacher relations." The next most popular, in order, were: career education, student dropouts, teacher evaluation, the handicapped student, educational costs/finances, the curriculum, education for citizenship, work-study programs and home study and work habits.

are an effective way to attract parents to early morning meetings of Title I parent advisory groups.

On a similar note, inner-city Detroit parents turned out in droves for PTA meetings while Carl Marburger was principal. Marburger, now senior associate for the National Committee for Citizens in Education (NCCE), said at least 800 parents would come to the PTA meetings, which always contained these four ingredients: fun, food, kids on the program and meaningful involvement. And the parent-teacher group ran several after-school programs, including day care for children and a "Peace & Quiet Club" for the adults, Marburger said.

Open house at the school can be more lively when students do the explaining. Everyone benefits, said a Home and School Institute newsletter, because "teachers get a chance to relax, youngsters get a chance to shine and parents enjoy it more. Upper elementary grades are a good place to start," the article added.

The Institute also recommended providing child care for parent meetings and trying a "cocktail hour" time for PTA. By starting at 6 p.m. with a casserole or snack, the meeting can end by 8:30 p.m.—instead of a late hour—and may even spark new membership by avoiding competition with whatever is on TV, the newsletter said.

Other Institute suggestions included a suggestion box and "Parent Buddies." The suggestion box should be easily accessible, but out of sight of front office personnel so parents will not feel self-conscious using it. It should be checked frequently and responses should be printed in the school newsletter. Parent Buddies are paired with new parents to welcome them and introduce them around at their first school meeting. "This is especially needed and welcomed by foreign-speaking parents," the Institute said.

School-Community Councils

The preceding suggestions, while all worthwhile, appeal primarily to parents and tend to exclude students and nonparent residents. Many of the suggestions also require minimal involvement, such as a one-time school visit. Community input received under such circumstances is apt to be fairly superficial.

In school districts truly committed to community involvement, these informal types of participation are supplemented by structured committees which permit interested citizens to gain expertise in school problems and to have a voice in the decision-making process.

In many districts, this formal mechanism is a school building-level council. The Institute for Responsive Education (IRE) estimates that at

least 3,000 such councils already exist in schools across the country. Their makeup varies widely from district to district: some councils are elected, while others are appointed; some are geared exclusively to parents, while others include other citizens and students; some specifically exclude teachers, while others specify that teachers and noncertified school employes should be members; some are merely advisory, while others have been delegated decision-making powers by the principal or the school board.

In spite of the diversity, however, the councils share a common purpose: to work with the principal, faculty, students and other school groups (such as the PTA) to develop recommendations or policies for improving the local school. An integral part of the concept requires that council members seek opinions and suggestions from the general community when developing recommendations. The Pittsburgh Public Schools, in a handbook for elected parent representatives, suggests using questionnaires, public meetings, conferences and posted telephone hours as ways to solicit and receive community input.

The handbook continued, "Parent representatives should consider and act for the needs of all children in the school rather than act on their own opinions and viewpoints." The handbook also urged the parents "to check the facts and correct misapprehensions when another parent is possibly misinformed." The parent representatives at each school elect a chairman and a representative to a Cluster Council, which represents one high school and the elementary and junior high schools that feed into that high school. Cluster Councils meet with an assistant superintendent or designee to discuss city-wide or cluster-level concerns. The cluster representative reports back to the local school and the information, in turn, filters down to the community at large—strengthening the two-way communication between school and community at all levels.

Guidelines for School-Level Councils

"The biggest mistake administrators make," said NCCE's Carl Marburger, "is that they give citizens the impression they have more power to make changes than they actually do. Citizens don't have the power to change the teacher contract," he said as an example, "and they should be told that at the outset."

Administrators can also unknowingly scuttle a group by not giving them a specific task. "The biggest problem with school-initiated committees," said Don Davies, IRE president, "is that they are created without a clear mandate.

"Most parents start with very modest expectations," Davies con-

tinued. He listed four possibilities for citizen review: (1) **selection of a principal**—school-level councils can interview candidates and recommend their first, second and third choices to the superintendent; (2) **budgeting**—councils can set priorities on budget items that can be determined at the local level; (3) **program evaluation**—councils can assess the school program year by year, starting with one subject or one grade level; or (4) **new programs**—councils can review and approve or veto proposed new programs.

In *Schools Where Parents Make a Difference*, Davies listed the following guidelines for local school councils:

- Decisions about size, membership, function and ways of working should be made by each school district through joint planning, involving the school committee, the superintendent, other central office administrators, teachers and teacher organizations, parents, citizens and students. Local conditions, needs, experience and values are the best guides for deciding what kind of council plan, if any, should be tried.

- Initiative can come from school people or community people. Regardless of who takes the first step, joint planning is essential from the beginning. A plan for collaboration developed unilaterally by administrators is not likely to succeed any better than a plan developed by a parent group without the genuine involvement of others who will be affected by the plan.

- Council members should be elected by a democratic process determined during planning. While a majority of the members should be parents of the children attending the school, councils should also include teachers and other school staff, community residents and students. Even in elementary schools, the perspective of students—the "consumers" of the programs—can be helpful.

- Membership in the council should be representative of diverse groups and interests in the community, including different racial, cultural and economic backgrounds, and different political or social viewpoints.

- Existing parent groups should play an important role in developing plans for a new council. It is important to coordinate such groups as parent-teacher-student associations (PTSAs), Title I or bilingual advisory committees. Having a school council does not eliminate the need for other groups. An existing PTSA, for example, can become an arm of a school council.

- A cooperative and mutually supportive relationship between the school council and the school principal is of special importance. The principal is in a key position to aid or block the development of an effective council.

- The members of a school council and the principal need assistance, information, orientation and planning for the council to have a fair chance of success. Lack of access to information about school policies, budgets and problems, and lack of training in organizing a group are the major causes of failure. Such support need not cost much money. But some financial support is necessary to cover the costs of planning, training workshops, duplication of materials and newsletters, and other means of communication with all members of the school community.

- The school board should see to it that each school council is evaluated at least once a year and that each council reports annually on its work, achievements and problems. The basis for such evaluation must be included in the original design of the council so standards for judging success are understood and agreed upon.

- An effective council needs written rules for its operation—developed jointly with and approved by the school board.

Listening and Leveling

Organizing a school building council, even with the above mentioned safeguards, does **not** guarantee that communication will take place. Communication across a conference table can break down if participants of the group are not careful to listen to each other. In *Together: Schools and Communities*, Miriam Clasby of IRE describes listening as "understanding the message another person wants to send.'

"To really hear—especially a message we don't agree with—we need to resist the impulse to judge the importance or validity of that message," Clasby explains. Nonlistening happens when a person thinks more about what to say next than about what the other person is saying. Another communication barrier arises from "dominating the discussion rather than encouraging others to speak up," she says. And a third roadblock can be caused by "ignoring another's remarks by shifting the topic, rather than helping out with some good questions."

Good listening habits help, but they aren't the only answer. The opposite side of the coin is leveling. Clasby describes leveling as

disclosing "as fully as possible the concrete experiences, specific facts, thoughts and feelings that make our views sensible to us." Nonleveling happens, she says, when people mistakenly assume they have made their position clear, but have left out relevant facts. Another nonleveling technique, according to Clasby, is to say "some people think . . ." when the person really means "I think this and it is important to me."

District-Wide Communication

School districts around the country have developed hundreds of printed documents to inform community residents of new school programs and to introduce the district to parents new to the community. The most basic communication vehicle is the monthly or quarterly newsletter which can explain complex topics, like the school budget or district-wide achievement test scores. The school newsletter can also relay routine but important information like school bus schedules. They also often contain feature stories about interesting services the school provides.

Ongoing programs and special events can be publicized through brochures. The Brockton, Mass., community schools publish brochures about the school planetarium, the school-YMCA swim team and a three-day arts and crafts celebration known as Summerfest. The lightweight brochures are bulk-mailed and often contain a tear-off portion that the recipient can return with comments or an offer to volunteer.

The North Allegheny School District in Pittsburgh, Pa., publishes a Yellow Pages for parents, which describes where to call to find out information about certain school programs. Included in the alphabetical listing are the names of each school principal, a short description of the administration departments, and such general information as graduation requirements and the procedures for emergency school closings.

The district also has a booklet describing the citizens advisory committee and a handbook for volunteers. In addition to the advisory committee booklet, a brochure lists the names, addresses and phone numbers of each advisory committee member. The date and time of the monthly advisory committee meeting are listed, along with an invitation to the public to attend. A similar brochure lists addresses and phone numbers of school board members and the names and work numbers of key members of the central administrative staff.

The Moore County schools in Carthage, N.C., publish a small poster for parents with a map of the 700-square-mile county with stars locating each school. The map key gives the school name, the principal's name and the school phone number. The opposite side of the poster has

How Are They Involved?

"Does your district provide ways for parents or community members to be involved in any of the following?"

Topic	Percent of Respondents
School-community councils	64
Curriculum content	60
School district goals	48
Planning new buildings	48
Field trips	48
Planning new programs	46
Program evaluation	41
Budgets	38
Homework policies	26
School time schedule	24
Pupil placement	21
Grades	21
Staff inservice training	18
Desegregation	15
Other	12
Community control	8
Teacher certification	4
Collective bargaining	2
Voucher plans	1

(From the *EDUCATION U.S.A.* community involvement survey; based on replies from 185 schools and districts.)

capsule descriptions of basic information about school size, organizational structure, school policies and instructional programs.

Moore County also publishes a pamphlet with multiple choice questions about the county and the school district. In the introduction, Supt. R. E. Lee explained that the booklet was an outgrowth of a conference attended by interested citizens, students and staff. The reason for the booklet was to inform the public and arouse their interest in making suggestions for improving the schools. Enclosed in the pamphlet was a return card with space for suggestions. As follow-up, civic programs were planned to expand upon the 11 topics covered in the booklet. They included early childhood education, the high school, educational media, facilities, transportation and student services and finance.

Perhaps the biggest barrier to communication between educators and their community is the language barrier of education jargon. The explosion of "movements," like career education and community schools, and the plethora of new teaching philosophies, like open classrooms and team teaching, are bound to bewilder the average parent. Educators who assume the general public learns about these trends and terms through newspaper articles are sadly mistaken. A study of 50 consecutive issues of 12 newspapers in 11 states turned up startling information that school news comprised an average of less than 2%. R. J. Gordon, describing his research in the *Journal of Education Research*, added that more than half of that tiny percentage was devoted to coverage of school sports. Based on Gordon's findings, it is obvious that the schools must do the translating if meaningful discussion on such topics is ever to occur.

Community Services

A district which schedules public meetings, publishes a newsletter and stages special events may achieve a significant level of community involvement—but it will still miss a percentage of those parents and community members who never enter a school. One way to get feedback from these nonparticipants is through a community survey. The Ocean View School District in Huntington Beach, Calif., has conducted scientific surveys of its parents each year since 1971. The surveys are mailed to 2,000 parents selected randomly from computer enrollments along with a cover letter from the superintendent and a return envelope. A follow-up mailing is done and follow-up phone calls are made until 90% of the surveys have been returned.

The responses are analyzed by computer to obtain both district-wide and local school results. Gayle Wayne, district communications director, said the surveys are valuable for two reasons: they "flag" potential

problem areas, and they provide an evaluation tool to measure whether the district is meeting its educational objectives.

One trouble spot identified by the Huntington Beach surveys led to positive action and improved survey scores. In 1973, nearly one-third of the parents answered "no" to the question, "Do you feel discipline is properly handled at your child's school?" The school-by-school scores identified eight or nine schools with particularly high negative responses, which led to public meetings and discussions through the schools' citizen advisory committees.

Most parents complained they were not given sufficient information about the school's disciplinary policies and procedures, Wayne said. At one school, 350 parents showed up at a meeting on the subject, and a committee of parents was appointed to develop a parent handbook on discipline. Parents also asked how they could help with better discipline at home. The schools responded with workshops on parent effectiveness training and on assertive discipline. The latter was open to both teachers and parents.

According to Wayne, the discipline issue dropped from 32% disapproval in 1973 to 16% in 1975. The test questions are developed by a nonprofit research firm which performs the surveys at cost because the school district is a member of the firm. But surveys of this type must have a 90% return rate to be reliable, she said. Schools that "develop questionnaires through faculty meetings and send them home with the kids," she added, are in trouble for several reasons:

- Teachers are not trained in formulating objective questions and tend to "lead" parents into the answer by the way the questions are phrased. Educators also tend to presuppose a certain amount of knowledge.

- The take home rate drops with the age of the children. "The kindergartners through fourth graders are fairly reliable, but by the seventh and eighth grade, you're lucky to hit half the kids," she said.

- Returning the survey to the child's teacher eliminates the anonymity achieved with a mail survey and this may bias the responses.

For districts that do not have access to a low cost research facility, she suggested hiring a part-time research consultant to develop the questions and methods of administration that will be cost-effective. For example, she said, the follow-up phone calls could be made by trained volunteers.

As a final caution, Wayne advised districts not to ask questions about

anything the district is not willing to change. "If you ask whether they like the lunch program and 70% say no, you'd better be prepared to change the program. Otherwise, you just make lots of people unhappy," she concluded.

Forming Alliances

In times of trouble, allies can sometimes be found in unlikely places. Cleveland Supt. Paul Briggs, who enjoys what he terms an amiable relationship with the unions that work in his district, was able to enlist the support of organized labor for a bill before the state legislature. The bill was designed to help Cleveland avoid a one-time budget deficit caused by a revenue shortage over which the district had no control. Because the bill would benefit only one school district, the state-wide education organizations would not support it, Briggs told a National Academy of School Executives seminar.

But the unions were sympathetic and they have clout at the statehouse, he added. And the measure passed. The point is that educators should broaden their horizons when looking for support. "We've got a host of friends," Briggs said. "Public education is fundamental to a democracy. To a great extent, the fault is ours that we haven't been able to get more support for the schools."

Whether the task is approving a bond issue or closing a school, districts should enlist the aid of opinion leaders in the community. Those people usually are not in visible positions of authority, but for other reasons are respected and influential. Ronald Powers, in a paper entitled "Identifying the Community Power Structure," recommended interviewing "knowledgeables" in the community to determine who the opinion leaders are for various issues. Those opinion leaders who receive the most "votes" are then interviewed to see if they consider themselves as opinion leaders. The paper, published by the Iowa State U. Extension Service, described "knowledgeables" as persons "who, by virtue of their occupation, are likely to have an opportunity to see, hear and know a good deal about various community issues." Examples of knowledgeables are bankers, editors, extension workers, secretaries of chambers of commerce and local government officials.

Once the opinion leaders are identified, the power structure (e.g., the way the opinion leaders interact) must be determined. "In small communities," Powers said, "we can get information about the power structure by observing which of the persons named have coffee together, get together socially, frequently stop by each other's places of business or are related to each other." The last step is to determine how the school

district will approach and work with opinion leaders in bringing about the desired change.

Pressure Groups

In communities where groups are highly political, the superintendent's job can become practically a revolving door. In big cities particularly, the secret to "staying power" for superintendents often lies in their ability to deal with pressure groups. Herman Goldberg, who for 24 years was superintendent of the Rochester, N.Y., Public Schools, suggests meeting with an outside group on their own turf. "It gets you out from behind your big desk and away from the secretary who protects you," Goldberg said.

Each group must be analyzed on its own merits, added Paul Briggs, who has been the Cleveland superintendent for 13 years. The first step is to determine what the group stands for and whether the membership is truly grassroots. Are they right? If the group has a legitimate concern, Briggs said, "Keep an open door. Even if you can't accommodate their request, they'll respect you for being open to them."

When Briggs first came to Cleveland, he was confronted by a group of civil rights activists who had closed down the schools with 16 demands. Briggs met with the group, reviewed the demands and told them he would "have to do his homework" on them. A week later, he met with the group, told them which of the requests were not feasible, which could be implemented right away and which would be long-range goals. The group appointed a committee to work with the superintendent to reach the goals. Briggs said the same leader who closed the schools served several months later as cochairman of a committee to pass a bond issue.

If the group does **not** have legitimate concerns, one strategy can be to create a counter-organization and give them a job to do, Briggs added. Another possibility is to ignore the group. "What is their motive?" Briggs asked. "If bad publicity is their method of getting recognition, let them. Several bad stories aren't going to hurt your image if you always deal honestly with the issues."

On the issue of publicity, Briggs observed that educators "haven't learned to use TV with pressure groups, although pressure groups have certainly learned to use TV on us." When speaking into a television camera, express your views concisely so the editors do not have to cut your remarks out of context, he advised. "And in a crisis, don't go on (video) tape, go on live," he added. That way, "they can't put you back to back with the opposition."

In complex issues, Briggs recommends staying "general" as long as possible. "Don't harden your position too early. Give the pressure group the opportunity for a hearing," he explained. The school's position should be correct, flexible and the best alternative for all the children, and it should be formulated with the advantages of local input, he said.

Briggs' operating philosophy is to take the initiative in community issues to forestall the need for pressure groups. However, he cautioned superintendents, "Never talk about what you are going to do too far in advance. The public is impatient and will not give you time to plan." The solution is to keep many projects in various stages of development so you will always have something to show to the community, he concluded.

Chapter 2.

Volunteers: An Involvement Explosion

It's important for me, as a teacher, to know that I have arranged for an older person and a child to get together in a relationship where both are thinking, learning, exchanging. In short, they are living. I just get them together and allow that magic thing to happen . . . a magic that nobody, nobody else can bring about.

A Boston teacher

The use of school volunteers has expanded greatly in recent years and the trend shows no signs of abating. A U.S. Bureau of the Census study in 1974 determined that more than two million Americans had volunteered in education—with an average contribution of six hours per week. Responses to the *Education U.S.A.* survey indicated that the extent of volunteer involvement in the nation's schools runs the gamut from no volunteers to large, highly organized volunteer programs. Of the nearly 200 questionnaires returned, 16 schools reported using no volunteers and several other districts said they used only a small number of volunteers. At the opposite end of the spectrum loom the giants: Los Angeles with 20,000 volunteers, the state of Maryland with 16,000 and Miami with more than 10,000 willing workers.

In addition to increasing in numbers, the corps of volunteers has become more diverse: mothers of school children are still a mainstay in most programs, but they are being joined by business executives, high school students, senior citizens and minority group members.

Volunteer "job descriptions" are becoming more diverse as well. To the traditional tasks of homeroom mother and field trip chaperone have been added reading and math tutors, clerical assistants, library aides and a host of speakers who visit classrooms to show slides of trips, demonstrate hobbies or describe their careers. The variety of volunteer pos-

sibilities is limited only by the imaginations of program planners and the needs and wants of teachers. Here is a sampling of some volunteer programs:

- **"Motor Moms"** in the Lisle, Ill., Community School District work with small groups of kindergarten children to develop motor skills through such activities as skipping, tossing a ball and using a balance beam. Each "Mom" plans her own half-hour program using a handbook that explains the principles of the program and suggests activities.

- **"Living Historians,"** like 92-year-old Edward Clark, bring history alive to elementary, middle and high school students in the Boston schools. Clark compares his boyhood life in the rural south with urban life in today's Boston.

- **Resource Center volunteers** in the Lower Merion (Pa.) School District create educational shoe box games, gather scraps for classroom projects and research ideas for self-paced instructional packets. The resource center materials are needed by district teachers who individualize instruction in open classrooms.

- **Volunteers in Public Schools** (VIPS) screen all Houston kindergarteners each September—testing hearing, vision, social maturity and language development. The volunteers are trained in two large downtown Houston churches.

- **"Picture Ladies"** in the Peoria (Ill.) Public Schools personalize art appreciation by bringing art prints into the classroom. The handbook suggests discussing color and shapes and encouraging the children to express their feelings and reactions to the paintings. Each "Picture Lady" selects one grade level and speaks to each class in that grade once a month.

- **Guest speakers** at Indian Hills High School in Oakland, N.J., have included ambulance drivers, police officers and motor vehicle inspectors, who come to the school to speak to health classes. Planning board members, real estate and insurance agents speak to social studies classes. Foreign-born parents can add a special dimension to foreign language classes.

- **An escort service** run by students from William H. Taft High School in Bronx, N.Y., helps protect the elderly in their low-income neighborhoods from harm. The students escort the senior

citizens to the store, the bank and to hot lunch programs. The service is provided during school hours and the students' voluntary service becomes part of their official school records.

Student Volunteers

Volunteer programs using students can yield several benefits. The high school student who tutors an elementary child gains self esteem and learns about a possible career. The student being tutored improves academically and usually feels better just from knowing someone cares. Perhaps most importantly, the volunteer learns first-hand some of the rewards of volunteerism and this high school experience may set a pattern for volunteering in later life.

Some educators have decided the experience of volunteering should be a structured part of a high school education because it introduces students to the "real world." According to the *New York Times*, the Riverdale private school in Fieldston, N.Y., requires its students to log at least 60 hours of volunteer work in order to qualify for a high school diploma.

At Belmont (Mass.) High School, volunteer experiences are tied in with career exploration through a program called Community Internship Timesharing Experience (CITE). Students work in a community agency or office for a 10-week grading period. Most work an average of two hours a day, two or three days a week. The students may receive credit for their internship as an independent study project. To receive academic credit, the proposal must be approved by the school's independent study committee. The student then keeps a log which is turned over to an advisor.

To Ann Wyman, education coordinator for CITE, the value of the volunteer experience is unrelated to course credit. "Many students have more credits than they need to graduate. I feel it's much more important to have actual work experience on their records than any credit hours they would earn," she explained. Careers that have been explored through CITE include: physical therapist, motorcycle mechanic, dentist, landscape architect, travel agent, potter, florist and lobbyist. Community service volunteers have served as recreation volunteers at a local school for the blind, worked in nursing homes, hospitals and the Council on Aging, and have worked in a Belmont selectman's office and at the health department.

Although Wyman lines up most of the CITE opportunities, the student and a community advisor have wide latitude in determining the scope of the volunteer's work. One senior student has worked all year at an elementary school implementing Project See, which is a kit designed

to detect learning disabilities in young children. Although she is technically assigned to the principal, the student, who has completed a child care course at Belmont, works almost exclusively with teachers, scheduling the screening and administering the program herself.

According to one expert on youth involvement, giving students the responsibility for the implementation and success of a program can be a crucial factor in the program's success. In an *American Education* article, Mary Conway Kohler, director of the National Commission on Resources for Youth, described the "magic ingredient" for a successful youth volunteer program:

> It's definitely not just a matter of altruism. Youthful idealism is of course important, but that's only part of the picture. These kids have imagination. They have insight. They have more ability to size up a situation and decide what to do about it than most adults seem to realize. They need some guidance from competent adults, of course. But these kids don't want to be thought of as passive do-gooders ready to follow whatever orders someone chooses to give them. They want to participate, to be part of the action. And that means contributing ideas, taking part in the planning, making decisions and following through, often to the extent of fully operating projects they themselves conceive of.

As an example, Kohler said the students volunteering for the Commission's Youth Tutoring Youth program designed most of the imaginative word and picture games used in the program handbook. The Commission operates a clearinghouse of successful youth volunteer programs. Over the years, experience has shown the Commission that programs that succeed share the following characteristics:

- They fill genuine needs for both adolescents and society.
- They offer "active learning in an age of spectatorship."
- They offer challenge—providing youth a chance to do something that is difficult as well as meaningful.
- They promote maturity and responsibility.
- They give adolescents a taste of the options available in the adult world.
- They involve working partnerships between youth and adults.

- They offer a community experience, "a sense of belonging to an extended family, and the exhilaration that comes from being associated with others in significant activities."

An innovative program benefiting lonely children in the Palo Alto, Calif., School District involves training junior and senior high school students to be "peer counselors." The program is directed by two psychologists who serve as consultants to the district. In an article written for *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, program co-director Barbara Varenhorst said peer counseling is open to any secondary student "who knows what it is like to have problems and who is willing to spend 18 hours of his or her own time to be trained." She added, "Consequently, some enroll to learn how to help others, while others come to get help for themselves."

The training focuses on listening and problem-solving skills. It also tries to teach students the difference between giving advice and actual counseling. Although the students are given specific assignments, Varenhorst said the ultimate goal is to bring about "changes in relationships, as a trained corps of students sensitively observes needs and reaches out to help others in a natural way."

In one assignment, a high school boy helped a second grade boy learn constructive alternatives to fighting in class. After four weeks, Varenhorst said, the second grader's teacher reported that the child could be kept in class for a much longer time each day. In another case, two high school students played games with handicapped peers to provide social contact for the students. Three student counselors were trained to conduct structured interviews to help with a district research study. "They interviewed peers about sensitive issues that might have elicited different responses if adults had been doing the interviewing," Varenhorst noted.

On a less structured scale, students in many other school districts provide companionship to others through tutoring programs and other activities. Junior high students in Westside Community Schools, Omaha, Neb., provide companionship to senior citizens. Students in one class deliver hot lunches to senior citizens through the Meals on Wheels program and students in another class take bingo prizes to residents of a nursing home. For students who have no grandparents nearby, the contact with a member of the older generation can be a valuable learning experience. In a *New York Times* story cited earlier, Alice Brach, a 15-year-old ninth grader, described her experiences after visiting a home for the elderly:

> I've always been bad with old people. I was afraid of them. But then Jill suggested we go to the home and I'm glad I did. It has

helped me to relate to old people; they've become a part of my life. We do some of the visiting there on our own and we've made special friends . . . Lots of those in the home are from Poland and Germany and Russia and they're all alone; we've become like their families.

The Business Community

In the *Education U.S.A.* survey, the problem most frequently mentioned in the use of volunteers was the growing number of women entering the work force. Because most people work during school hours, it is generally assumed that persons who are gainfully employed are not available for volunteer work in the schools.

But in Philadelphia, for example, more than 12 companies participate in the school volunteer program. Some of the companies give their employes released time to serve as volunteers. According to the newsletter, *Volunteer Viewpoints*, some of the Philadelphia companies reimburse employes for their transportation costs. In others, the volunteer program takes place on company grounds. Some employes tutor children in math and English. Others train high school students in auto air conditioning, station management and sales; and still others teach gas chemistry, gas making and air pollution abatement.

Why would companies be willing to give their employes two hours off to tutor a child? In the National School Volunteer Program newsletter, *School Volunteer*, the community affairs representative of a major national oil company explained that school volunteer programs help business "bridge the gap" between industry and the community. As the educational system's "biggest customers," industry should assist education for its own self-interest, the spokesperson said. By last December, the company had 146 tutors in six company locations across the country. "For this company," the spokesperson concluded, "a volunteer program is a way for us to keep a finger on the pulse of public opinion that is so vital to industry's survival."

Just as industry needs to keep tabs on education, the schools have an obligation to students to keep the curriculum relevant to the needs of business. Many school districts have recruited working men and women from a range of trades and professions to serve on advisory councils for career education, vocational education and distributive education. For example, the Nacogdoches (Tex.) Independent School District has committees of employers and employes advising the schools on health occupations, forestry, office education, industrial training, building trades, auto mechanics, cosmetology, distributive education, agriculture and homemaking. Principal Johnny Johnston said the committees

assist in planning, developing and evaluating the programs—whose success depends on "a close relationship between the business community and the schools."

Business-oriented teacher inservice training is available to Madison, Wis., teachers through the Business and Education Coordinating Council of Madison. The council, which is a cooperative venture between the public schools and chamber of commerce members, sponsors a 35-hour summer business and society seminar which studies the American free enterprise system in detail. Topics covered include the blessings and evils of profit and capital accumulation; environmental and resource problems; the corporate merger movement and big versus small business. The council also sponsors one-to-one seminars on the role of business in the economy. Still on the drawing boards are career-oriented internships for students and a business and community resource directory for teachers.

Volunteers for Better Management

Perhaps the most logical contribution business can make to the schools is to share management expertise in applying business principles to the financial and business aspects of running a school district. Such assistance is not limited to large school districts with multi-million dollar budgets. In fact, this kind of expertise is present to some degree in every community and could be used to advantage in most school districts. Management advisory teams have been used successfully in Elyria, Ohio, a city school district of 13,000 pupils; in St. Louis, with 82,000 students; in Dallas, Tex., which at the time of the study had 177,000 students and an enrollment growth rate of 10% per year; and in a statewide program in Washington.

In St. Louis, the Management Assistance Program (MAP) was initiated in November 1975 by Civic Progress, Inc., whose 30 active members include the chief executive officers of the largest corporations in the city. According to Elaine Afton, public affairs director for the schools, the organization's offer was received enthusiastically by both the school board and the administration. A management consulting firm was hired to determine which areas of school operation could benefit from business management techniques. Then executives were loaned by the companies to develop the recommendations. Some 2,000 executive-hours later, the board of education adopted five major and four minor recommendations that led to a reorganization of the top administrative staff and affected the budget, planning and electronic data processing operations. The executives contributed an additional 500 hours to help implement the changes.

Organizing a Volunteer Program

The structure of a school volunteer program will be influenced by the size of the school district and the scope of the volunteer program. Small programs can be staffed exclusively by volunteers, while others have a paid staff in a central office to recruit and train volunteers and a paid coordinator at each school to schedule and supervise them. The program can be a department within the school district—as was the case with most districts surveyed for this report—or it can be a private, nonprofit organization affiliated with a school district, like the school volunteer programs in Boston and Pittsburgh.

Regardless of the size or structure, smooth running programs are begun and run by following the same basic steps:

- **Develop awareness and support** for a volunteer program. Programs developed by school district staff should get the approval and support of the board of education in the early stages. Citizen-initiated program leaders should talk to community leaders, service organizations, churches and other interested groups to build grassroots support. Program planners should tell the groups about successful volunteer programs in other communities and should ask their opinions about the types of volunteer programs that are needed. Whichever approach is used, the schools and the community should coordinate early so that neither side feels the concept is being imposed upon them.

- **Assess the need.** These first two steps go hand-in-hand because support cannot be generated without evidence of the need. Teachers, administrators, librarians and any other possible users of volunteers should be consulted **early** in the planning stages so the program is oriented to

serve actual needs. A problem mentioned several times in answer to the *Education U.S.A.* survey by volunteer coordinators was "opposition by the teacher union." Such opposition can be minimized, if not eliminated, by involving teachers from the outset, and by making clear at all stages that the intent of the program is to assist—not replace—paid staff members.

- **Design a program to fit the need.** At this stage, planners should formulate objectives to guide the program. As suggested by Barbara Carter and Gloria Dapper in *Organizing School Volunteer Programs,* the objectives cannot be as specific as a company's goal of "increasing sales by 7% by mid-June." At the other extreme, a volunteer program's objectives should not be as vague as "meeting the needs of a school." The best objectives, the authors concluded, show the approaches the program will take toward meeting the needs that have been discovered and analyzed. The objectives should be ones that teachers can support and should reflect "a mutual understanding of the role of a volunteer," they added.

- **Recruit volunteers.** (This will be covered in depth later in this same chapter.)

- **Provide orientation and training** for the volunteers and orientation for teachers on the use of volunteers.

- **Evaluate the volunteers** and all other phases of the program.

- **Recognize the volunteers for their service.** An ongoing program that shows volunteers they are needed and appreciated will build enthusiasm and commitment. It can also aid in recruiting new volunteers.

In Dallas, a task force was initiated by Supt. Nolan Estes, who issued a plea and a challenge to Chamber of Commerce members to bring the profit motive to certain aspects of the public schools. The Chamber of Commerce of the United States, in a case study of the project, estimated that 50 Dallas business people contributed approximately $125,000 worth of consulting time. At the end of the two-year study, the Dallas schools received detailed recommendations for improving personnel procedures, financing, purchasing, school facilities, management systems, food services, distribution and warehousing. Most of the recommendations were approved by the school board.

In addition to benefits of efficiency, the project led to "a general increase in public confidence in school operations," said the Chamber, because the new partnership showed taxpayers "that the schools are genuinely interested in efficiency and economy." Businesspeople who participated said they "gained as much as they put in," the Chamber added. "Being able to observe first-hand has given them a new interest in educational affairs in the city." Several of the consultants went on to speak to civic groups about the new alliance between business and the schools.

Administration of the Program

As the number of volunteers at a given school increases, the addition of a coordinator of volunteers becomes desirable to relieve the principal of the paperwork and coordination. The coordinator can be a volunteer, a part-time employe or a full-time staff member, depending on the scope and the needs of the program. The coordinator can work with teachers to match volunteers with the appropriate tasks and can serve as a liaison if problems develop between a volunteer and a teacher.

In a decentralized volunteer program, the paid volunteer coordinator can assume responsibility for recruitment, orientation and training, recognition dinners and newsletters for the volunteers, recordkeeping and evaluation.

Volunteers in Education, a handbook prepared by the Recruitment Leadership and Training Institute, suggests that full-time volunteer coordinators perform three functions in the following priorities: (1) development and implementation of various volunteer services (60% to 70% of the time); (2) service as a substitute volunteer for special events and for a volunteer who cannot be replaced (20% to 30%); and (3) performance of routine tasks to support school administrative functions (10% to 20%). The handbook adds that time studies should be conducted regularly to guard against overloading the coordinator with routine administrative tasks.

The disadvantage of using unpaid coordinators is that the job may be shared by several volunteers, making coordination difficult. *Volunteers in Education* says records from programs studied indicate that the cost of a coordinator's salary often doubled or tripled volunteer services—more than offsetting the added staff cost.

Recruitment

Volunteer recruitment can—and usually does—take a variety of forms, from one-to-one contact by current volunteers to public service announcements in the mass media. Some programs recruit primarily in late summer for the entire school year, while others see the need for continuous publicity.

Many programs, including the one in the Nacogdoches (Tex.) Independent School District, launched their volunteer effort with brochures sent home with students, newspaper, radio and television announcements, and voluntary advertisements through local businesses.

The School Volunteers of Worcester (Mass.) use an array of posters, flyers and an eye-catching black and gold bumper sticker that reads, "Be a School Volunteer." The volunteer office telephone number is written in smaller letters.

School Volunteers of Boston (SVB), in its tenth annual report, commented that recruiting was "greatly facilitated by the decentralization of the organization and the appointment of district coordinators." The report noted that the coordinators' broad knowledge of the diversity of volunteer programs all over the city led to greater news and feature coverage in both metropolitan and community newspapers. Also, their knowledge of the needs of each district enabled recruitment appeals to be tailored to community newspapers.

The recruitment techniques used by Boston include:

- Letters and bulletin recruitment items sent to ministers, rabbis, priests and religious organizations;
- Transit posters placed in 300 metropolitan buses and subways;
- A brochure, geared especially to older and retired citizens, called "Share a Gift . . . Wisdom";
- Recruitment appeals sent to college and university service organizations and to continuing education program personnel.

Boston also recruits through businesses—an effort that was enhanced

by a provision in Boston's desegregation order that pairs many Boston schools with businesses and universities for enrichment purposes. As in Philadelphia, a number of Boston employers give their staff released time to volunteer in the schools. Six employes of one life insurance company became volunteer tutors after they saw an ad placed in their company newsletter. Another four employes have become arts and crafts assistants at an elementary school after being trained by the Children's Museum. The federal government is also getting into the act. According to the SVB annual report, 39 employes of HEW's Northeast Regional Office are school volunteers.

Community Service Organizations

Members of community service organizations can be recruited either individually or collectively. The National School Volunteer Program newsletter noted that a slide show on the Roane County, Tenn., volunteer program must have been effective because, following a presentation at a local civic meeting, the group voted for 100% participation in school programs. In large districts like Dallas, service organizations often vote to "adopt" a single school.

Nationwide groups with a long history of volunteerism include the Junior League and the American Assn. of University Women (AAUW). In Pittsburgh, the AAUW worked with librarians of the North Allegheny School District to create a comprehensive community resource directory. From the cross-indexed file, North Allegheny teachers can locate speakers willing to address their classes on careers, crafts, history, health, sports and recreation, science and hobbies. The list includes a Pennsylvania assemblyman; two foreign exchange students and staff members from Fort Pitt Museum and the Pittsburgh Zoo.

Local clubs with special interests are often willing to share their talents. The Massachusetts Horticultural Society trained 43 volunteers to bring their knowledge of plant growth and care to 25 Boston elementary schools in one program. Volunteers from the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and from the New England Aquarium use slide shows, and live specimens from the aquarium, to provide orientation for field trips and follow-up programs on those two cultural facilities.

Minority Volunteers

Schools with large minority group populations are often anxious to recruit adults from minority groups to help make them feel more a part of

the schools. Also, these adults can often be the most motivating and effective tutors of minority children. Because volunteerism has traditionally been a white, middle class phenomenon, the usual recruitment techniques often do not appeal to members of minority groups.

The Los Angeles Volunteer and Tutorial Program has had success using community members to recruit on a one-to-one basis in minority neighborhoods. Jack Maguire, assistant director of the Los Angeles program, said the district has used federal manpower funds in the past to hire opinion leaders from minority groups to work part-time on recruitment. "We've found that the 'movers and the shakers' in the community are very busy people who do not want to work full time," he said. Spanish-speaking people who achieve leadership positions in the PTA or on school advisory committees are approached to work one-half day, three days a week. The recruiters tell their peers that the schools belong to them and that they do not need to know how to speak English in order to volunteer, Maguire said. If the prospective volunteers want to learn English, the schools offer adult education programs they can attend.

In the black community, the same formula is used, except the recruiters are usually former civil rights activists. They know the neighborhoods and are interested in helping the schools, Maguire said. Some of the minority recruiters have gone on to become full-time employes of the schools or candidates for the school board, he said. Los Angeles also has an advisory board with members who are employes of Head Start and other community programs. Those volunteers are very good sources for referrals, according to Maguire.

Senior Citizen Volunteers

As with minority recruitment, successful programs involving senior citizens need personal contacts. Los Angeles is using a $100,000 grant from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation to hire experienced volunteers as community representatives. Maguire said part-time employes, who are not necessarily senior citizens themselves, are talking to senior citizens groups and are visiting places where they gather. There is one community representative for each of the city school system's 12 geographic areas.

The City of Boston's Commission on Elder Affairs furnishes the school volunteer program with two senior aides to assist in recruitment. School Volunteers of Boston (SVB) has also received a grant from the Clark Foundation. They are using these funds to hire staff to recruit retirees from business and industry and to participate in pre-retirement programs in Boston companies. An SVB annual report says the retirees "will be placed in volunteer management and executive positions in the

Boston school system where they can best give assistance in the area of their special expertise."

In addition to visits by the elderly to the schools, the Boston intergenerational program involves sending trained students to interview senior citizens in the community. Students from 10 high schools interviewed scores of senior citizens in certain neighborhoods for information that was used to compile a history of the elementary schools of Boston.

Another source of volunteers is the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), which is a part of the federal government's ACTION agency. The St. Louis school volunteer program is negotiating with RSVP to use their volunteers in the schools. ACTION provides its volunteers with stipends for lunch and for their transportation.

Please Be Specific

Appeals for volunteers—whether in brochures, radio and television advertisements or presentations before community groups—should be specific. The appeal should list the types of volunteer opportunities available and the amount of time involved. Some programs require a minimum commitment of three hours per week for a school year. If training is offered, that should be made clear in the recruitment statement. Often, prospective volunteers are hesitant to apply because they feel they lack the necessary training.

In order to make appeals specific, the volunteer program must have files of specific requests from teachers. The Volunteer Bureau of Barrington, Ill., has developed a concise, one-page request form, with space for the teacher's request and the name and phone number of the volunteer. Three carbons are attached, permitting the teacher, volunteer, volunteer bureau and school office to each have a copy.

After the prospective volunteer is recruited, an interview is scheduled to explain the program and to determine which activity is most appropriate for the volunteer's interests and talents. The interview also serves as a screening device. "Screening is half the battle," says Lorna Wycoff of the National School Volunteer Program. The secret to building a dedicated corps of volunteers lies in "putting people where they want to be," she says.

A common complaint among school administrators is that volunteers are unreliable, tardy or uncommitted. Wycoff says reliability should be stressed in the pre-service interview. "If the school volunteer program is well organized and the coordinator is a professional, the volunteers you attract will be reliable," she contends. That point of view seems to be borne out by the experience of the Los Angeles volunteer program—which has been recruiting, training and using volunteers for 13 years.

"By and large," said assistant program director Jack Maguire, "we have found volunteers to be just as reliable as teachers. Volunteers have sick days and days when they don't perform their best, but then we've heard complaints about teachers and administrators being undependable, too." Maguire's point, of course, is that **some** volunteers will be unreliable, but that an efficiently operated organization should be able to keep that "unreliable" percentage to a minimum.

Orientation

In addition to the interview, the orientation session can serve as a screening device by spelling out more clearly what is expected of volunteers. Programs that offer a variety of volunteer opportunities make a distinction between orientation and training.

Orientations are general sessions designed to acquaint all volunteers with the policies and procedures of the school system. Training sessions are more specific, and may be offered by the supervising teacher (as on-the-job training) or through periodic workshops. In addition to a general orientation session, many school districts provide the volunteers with school handbooks. Sample handbooks were included in responses to the *Education U.S.A.* survey by 10 volunteer programs. Common elements included in most of them were:

- A letter of welcome from the superintendent of schools or the director of the volunteer program;
- Goals of the program;
- A checklist of volunteer opportunities;
- Rules or guidelines for volunteers (park in designated places, sign in at the principal's office, etc.);
- The role of the teacher;
- Rewards of volunteering;
- Volunteer support services (orientation, training, resource library, volunteer coordinators).

The handbook for the Harborfields School District in Greenlawn, N.Y., included a calendar of the school year with all school holidays marked. Other handbooks included a short history of the school's

volunteer program and tips for working with young children.

The success of classroom volunteers and their satisfaction with the program will often hinge on the working relationships with the teacher. Some teachers assume their volunteer will be a highly trained professional, and they overwhelm them with responsibilities, while omitting explanations and supervision. At the other extreme is the teacher who relegates only boring, clerical tasks—giving the volunteer little opportunity to interact with children. To avoid such unfortunate circumstances, Los Angeles has written detailed volunteer job descriptions so both teachers and volunteers will know what to expect. Many other programs include a section in the handbook, or a separate handbook, that gives teachers tips on ways to make the volunteer a meaningful partner in the classroom. Often, it is the little things—like inviting the volunteer to the teachers' coffee room—that make a world of difference in the way the volunteer feels about the job.

Training

After a general orientation, some volunteer aides can proceed to their assignment and receive additional training "on the job," under the supervision of a teacher. For more specialized tasks, like tutoring or working with retarded children, additional formal training is desirable. Such training can be done at a single, half-day workshop or at a series of two-hour classes. The training may be conducted by school district staff, outside consultants or former volunteers.

In the Peoria (Ill.) School Volunteer Program, training and recruitment are provided by a 22-member steering committee composed of one administrator, two principals, one teacher, one counselor and 17 parent coordinators. In 1975-76, the committee provided 51 three-hour workshops for the district's 2,200 volunteers.

Training in Los Angeles is provided cooperatively by the volunteer program and the district's division of career and continuing education. The classes are open to volunteers, parents and "other interested parties," says program director Sarah Davis. The classes are taught by volunteers with teaching certificates in adult education. Topics covered include general school volunteer training, early childhood education, reading, math, motor skills, language arts and breaking through perceptual learning barriers. "The underlying theme of each class is the needs of the children and what we must do to serve them," Davis says.

The School Volunteers of Boston (SVB) provides four-part training sessions for tutoring in reading and in English as a second language, taught by specialists in those fields. A sampling of the two-hour workshops offered by SVB and their instructors include: "Communication

How Am I Doing?

- Do I plan for the activity which I have been assigned to?
- Do I make myself helpful by offering my services to the teacher when there is an obvious need for help?
- Do I observe closely to learn children's or adult's likes, dislikes, preferences, enthusiasms, aversions, etc.?
- Do I find opportunities for giving students choices or do I tell them what to do?
- Do I observe closely the techniques used by the teacher, and follow through when I am working with the group?
- Do I emphasize the times when students behave well and minimize the times when they fail to do so?
- Do I really listen to what students have to say?
- Do I give too much help to students rather than allowing them time to think?
- Do I accept criticisms and sugestions without becoming emotionally upset?
- Do I try to develop a friendly attitude with all of my co-workers?

(These self-evaluation questions can be used by volunteers in any program. They are taken from a longer list of such questions compiled by Maryland's Statewide Volunteers in Reading Program.)

with Multicultural Groups," by the staff of the school human relations department; "The Power of Art in the Curriculum," by a professor of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Graduate School; "Writing Skills for Individuals and Small Groups," by a private school teacher; and "Workshops for High School Volunteers," taught by SVB staff. The School Volunteer Assn. of Pittsburgh offers a reading and math games workshop every Friday afternoon.

Guidance counselors provided the training for 14 parent counseling aides in a program piloted in the spring of 1977 by the San Juan Unified School District in Carmichael, Calif. The parent aides contact families of children who are habitually tardy or truant to determine the underlying reasons for their behavior. According to *School News*, the San Juan newsletter, "finding the real reason requires contact with the student and his or her parents by people they believe can be trusted." The 14 volunteers were recommended by students as "parents in their neighborhood they can talk to," the newsletter added. The training focused on listening to others as well as gaining insights about themselves.

While each specialized workshop will differ in content, most preservice training will contain certain common elements. Those elements, as suggested in *Volunteers in Education*, are:

- An overview of the area for which training is given;
- Principles of human growth and development for the age group with which the volunteer will be working;
- General characteristics of the group of individuals the volunteer will be assisting;
- Definite objectives to be met through volunteer assistance;
- Specific activities to be carried out to meet those objectives;
- Materials, games and ideas for volunteers to use to make learning fun;
- Definition of the volunteer's role in relation to staff members;
- Definition of the staff member's role in relation to the volunteer.

The training overview can include an orientation to specific learning materials. If no single resource is used, the overview can serve as an introduction to the skills necessary to master reading or as a review that allows the tutor to "brush up" on math fundamentals or concepts. Tutors and classroom aides need to know how children learn in order to

adapt their teaching style to the students' age group. Children at different ages absorb information differently and will be motivated in different ways. Also, younger children have shorter attention spans and need a wider variety of stimuli.

An introduction to group characteristics will give the volunteer some background with which to help the child. For example, children who have difficulty reading sometimes are not verbally oriented. Handling objects, as well as talking about them, may help. Objectives give the volunteer a time frame and a goal toward which to work. A child who is learning English as a second language will learn grammar in the classroom. The tutor, then, should focus on general structure patterns and vocabulary, rather than grammatical details.

The activities referred to above give the volunteer tools for working with the child. *Volunteers in Education* notes that such tools give the volunteer confidence and a sense of security before the assignment begins. The activities can also be listed in the handbook to reinforce the training. The role definitions for volunteers and staffers give the volunteer an idea of what to expect, and can also forestall later misunderstandings.

For that matter, inservice training for the staff on how to use volunteers can ensure a more successful program. Several volunteer program coordinators responding to the *Education U.S.A.* survey reported problems getting teachers to use volunteers creatively and to the volunteer's fullest potential. The School Volunteer Program of Miami offers workshops, seminars and study sessions for principals and teachers as well as volunteers. In addition, Miami provides individualized, performance-based training packets which the faculty and volunteers may use on their own.

Whether or not the volunteer program includes formal pre-service training, all volunteers can benefit from access to relevant inservice training scheduled for school staff. In Boston, library volunteers and staff attended a workshop together. A speaker from the Harvard University Museum spoke on ways the museum's resources could be used by the library. A second speaker, a 4-H Club representative, demonstrated plant and indoor gardening programs that could be adapted for library use.

Evaluation

A program is unlikely to improve without an evaluation of its effectiveness. Unfortunately, many programs are not evaluated because of lack of time. Such omissions can be costly in terms of recruiting and maintaining volunteers. Many businesses may be reluctant to release

employes without hard evidence that the volunteer effort produces benefits. Also, a high turnover of volunteers may be attributable to a lack of concrete evidence that volunteering makes a difference. On the other hand, program evaluations that focus on improved test scores fail to measure the intangible benefits. Tutoring often improves a child's self-image and attitude towards school. Such children usually do not do well on standardized tests, and the evaluation could actually be harmful to a child's new self-confidence.

Teacher observation of student performance is a very subjective—but quite valid—method of evaluation, according to *Organizing School Volunteer Programs*. Another approach, used in a pilot program in Minneapolis, was to tutor half the children in first grade reading groups and compare their performance to the children who had no tutoring assistance. "Of 25 children in the unassisted group, only three advanced to the 1.9 grade level expected of a typical first grader by the end of the school year," the book says. "Nearly half of those who had the help of volunteers scored above 2.1, with three of the children reaching a third grade level of reading ability," it says.

Schools responding to the *Education U.S.A.* survey mentioned several other methods of evaluation. The Miami and Pittsburgh programs schedule feedback sessions with volunteers—Miami on a monthly basis and Pittsburgh as part of workshops. The Pine Bluff, Ark., volunteer coordinator and school director tries to contact each volunteer at least once a month. In Greenlawn, N.Y., the Marborfields School District volunteer coordinator uses phone calls and periodic meetings to keep in touch with volunteers. St. Louis polled students and teachers for reactions to the use of volunteers and asked volunteers their reactions to training and other aspects of the program.

In most of the programs mentioned, oral communication is supplemented with written forms which give all participants—teacher, volunteer, student and principal—an opportunity to rate the program. An Indianapolis-designed survey for volunteers incorporates questions used in other cities, so results can be compared. Written evaluation forms can be used to measure the effectiveness of the volunteer program as it relates to program goals or to the mechanics of program implementation. Volunteers can evaluate themselves to determine skill areas where they can be most useful, and weaknesses uncovered by a self-evaluation can indicate areas where more training is desirable.

Recognition

To reduce turnover and to boost volunteer morale, most school programs present certificates to volunteers, and many hold recognition

banquets at the end of the year. Such occasions can give special recognition to volunteers who have passed a milestone—like 1,000 hours of service. The banquets and other less formal social occasions can also be used to recruit new volunteers. Newsletters geared to the volunteers make them feel part of a larger effort by informing them of the variety of services being offered. The newsletter can also spotlight new activities which current volunteers can use to recruit their friends for programs.

Problems

Several respondents to the *Education U.S.A.* survey mentioned opposition from the teachers' union as a barrier or problem in their volunteer program. Those programs that have achieved good relations with the teachers' union have emphasized that the volunteers will come into the school only at the invitation of the principal, and into the

Let's Work, Not Organize

After a comparative study of citizen advisory committees, the Plymouth (Mich.) Community School District decided to develop a pre-structured committee organization so recruited members could begin immediately on the tasks assigned. Writing in *Converse*, a publication of the Michigan School Public Relations Assn., Plymouth community relations coordinator Florence Beier described the committee structure: 12 task forces with 12 members each met for 12 weeks. (The 144 citizens first agreed to serve on the total advisory committee.) At the first general session, each member then chose from a list of task forces prepared by the board of education. Topics included school maintenance, inservice, preschool, extracurricular and vocational programs. After three months, the task forces reconvened to submit detailed reports to the board. The board's responses to the recommendations were published through a joint advisory committee-board workshop, newspaper articles and a chart of results in a district-wide newsletter. "If both tasks and timelines are agreed upon in advance," Beier concluded, "committee members can then choose their area of interest, plan their work to meet the deadline, and know that the board will heed their advice."

classroom only at the invitation of the teacher. Good relations can be cemented in times of crisis. During a strike of Los Angeles teachers, for example, volunteer director Sarah Davis told volunteers they could do what they wanted as individuals, but that they should not go into the school as school volunteers. "That showed the union that we do not want noncertified people running the classes," said associate director Jack Maguire. "They realized volunteers are no threat."

The National School Volunteer Program (NSVP) is currently considering a policy against the use of volunteers during school strikes. NSVP members feel that volunteers are in the schools to assist and supplement teachers, **not** to replace them—but they said some superintendents and school principals have tried to keep schools open during strikes by using volunteers in the classroom. The suggested wording of the policy reads: "In the event of a strike when regular teacher supervision is not available, it would not be appropriate for volunteers to attempt to meet students' needs."

Another problem that was mentioned in survey responses was liability insurance for volunteers. The Los Angeles School District, which is self-insured, covers all volunteers whose names are on file with the district and who contribute at least three hours per week. This stipulation covers all volunteers because none are accepted who cannot contribute the three hour minimum. Maguire said workmen's compensation covers accidents involving volunteers. The school's self-insurance covers accidents to children who are in a volunteer's care.

For districts whose insurance will not cover volunteers, state legislation can provide the solution. In conjunction with a statewide Volunteers in Reading program, the Maryland state legislature passed a bill mandating that volunteer aides "shall be considered as agents of the local board of education . . . for the limited purpose of comprehensive liability insurance coverage . . . and for purposes of workmen's compensation coverage."

Several survey respondents mentioned that it was more difficult to recruit volunteers for secondary schools; and John Riley, principal of Indian Hills High School in Oakland, N.J., warned that an active enrichment program of outside speakers will produce "constant requests for equal time whenever religious, business, volunteer or political persons are used."

Perhaps the most delicate problem that faces volunteer programs is the matter of dismissing a volunteer who—for one reason or another—does not work out. If the problem is one of a personality clash between a teacher and a volunteer, it can sometimes be resolved by transferring the volunteer to another classroom. If the volunteer lacks the ability to tutor children, he or she might be transferred to a different type of volunteer activity. The Los Angeles schools have a volunteer coordinator and a

staff (faculty member) coordinator at each school. "These two can usually smooth out disagreements," Maguire said. As a last resort, the main volunteer office will talk to the volunteer if an actual dismissal becomes necessary. Usually, however, the volunteer is not happy in such circumstances and will drop out of the program before it reaches that point, Maguire said. In fact, in the 13-year history of the program, the assistant director could think of only two instances where volunteers were actually dismissed.

The most discouraging problem mentioned by most survey respondents was a **lack** of volunteers. Indianapolis Asst. Supt. Alexander Moore said, "Significant problems always exist in securing enough volunteers to meet the needs of the students. Teacher requests exceed supply by one-third." A parallel problem, raised by a Fairfax County, Va., principal, is that volunteers can be too successful in their training: "At first volunteers come easily to school, but by the end of the second year of the program, they discover that working for pay is a better idea," said George Fox. "Many decide that home is not all it is supposed to be. Several have told me that volunteering taught them to get out of the home and to get a job."

Based on interviews, survey responses and a review of current literature, it would seem that the solution to the volunteer shortage lies in a three-pronged approach: (1) constant recruiting; (2) working with businesses to obtain release time for employes; and (3) a broadened volunteer base that includes such nonworking citizens as retirees, senior high school students and even elementary-age tutors.

Chapter 3.

Involving the Community In Problem-Solving

The best decisions involve input from the most people.

Miriam Clasby,
Institute for Responsive Education

Whether the issue is career education or desegregation, passing a bond issue or closing a school, boards of education are increasingly turning to the community for advice and assistance. More often than not, such assistance comes in the form of a citizens advisory committee. Some school districts have general advisory committees to which they refer projects and problems all year long. Others have committees for a specific purpose and disband them after their final report to the board. Depending on the topic surveyed and the size of the district, the committee may be district-wide or based at the local school.

The opening question of the *Education U.S.A.* survey listed 19 topics ranging from field trips to collective bargaining. Districts were asked to check those categories in which citizens had an opportunity to become involved. The topics named most often were school-community councils (64% of the respondents) and curriculum content (60% of the respondents).

Nearly half (48%) involved the community in formulating district goals, and the same percentage used citizens in planning for new buildings. Another 48% used parents or citizens on field trips (the only volunteer-oriented activity on the list). Forty-one percent of the districts used citizen help to evaluate programs, while 38% involved citizens with planning the school budget. Areas in which citizens were least involved were voucher plans (less than 1%), collective bargaining (2%) and teacher certification (4%).

The statistics are based on questionnaires returned by 185 schools and districts in the United States and Canada. The vast majority of the

questionnaires were completed by superintendents or district-level employes, but a small percentage were returned by school principals, headmasters of private schools and state or provincial-level staff members. (The survey was not designed to provide scientific information that could be projected to **all** districts in the country. Instead, it was intended to show which issues most commonly involve citizen input among the districts that **do** involve citizens.)

The large number of districts using school-community councils can be partially attributed to federal programs in the schools—like Title I—that require parent advisory committees (see Chapter 4). School-level councils are also popular with parents because decisions on that level affect their children's education directly. The popularity of curriculum committees is somewhat surprising, since curriculum has long been considered the exclusive domain of professional educators. However, studies have shown that curriculum is an area where many parents desire a voice in the school. Writing in *Teachers College Record,* R. Gary Bridge described a survey of parents in a San Jose, Calif., school voucher experiment. "Parents were most interested in course content decisions," he said. "They were more interested in **what** was taught than in **how** it was taught. About three-fourths of the parents thought they ought to have a voice in curriculum decisions." Parents were least interested, Bridge added, "in deciding which teachers were hired and fired; only about half of the parents felt this was a valid concern of theirs."

Similarly, in the 1974 Gallup Poll of Public Attitudes Toward Education, 64% of the parents of public school children said they wanted more information about schools. When asked what kind of information was wanted, "information about the curriculum" scored much higher than "more information about my child," "information about grading," and "information about how parents can become involved in school activities."

The Possibilities Are Limitless

In addition to the categories mentioned in the survey question, a wide range of advisory committee tasks were mentioned by respondents in materials sent along with the questionnaires. The Bellefontaine (Ohio) City Schools created a Committee for Responsible Social Legislation to study the impact certain state legislation would have on Bellefontaine schools. The district also created a Human Relations Council to "curtail rumors and create a positive image of the schools." Both the Nacogdoches, Tex., schools and the Westside Community Schools in Omaha, Neb., have involved large numbers of citizens in self-studies of their

districts in conjunction with state and regional accreditation. The Harborfields School District in Greenlawn, N.Y., created a transportation committee that determined school hours and bus schedules, a discipline committee, and a committee to investigate closing two elementary schools. Another committee performed an economic analysis of the district. The parent advisory committee of Wheeler Elementary School in Burlington, Vt., participates in "teacher selection and school activities in general," according to Principal Ed White. The Lisle, Ill., school district created a Citizens Educational Review Committee which studied criteria for budget cuts and made recommendations to the school board. Carolyn Williams, coordinator of information there, reported that the board adopted 26 of the committee's 28 recommendations.

Committee Composition

The membership of any committee depends, in part, on the function of the group. Some committees will require special expertise, like Harborfields' economic analysis committee. Most general interest committees, however, strive to get a representative cross-section of the district or of the neighborhood school. For example, the Winber (Pa.) Board of Education appoints advisory committee members to represent a cross-section of the community. Criteria include geographic location, income, ethnic background, religion, race and organizational affiliation.

On a similar note, Barbara Sizemore, former superintendent of the Washington, D.C., schools, warned, "Superintendents have a tendency to appoint blue ribbon panels. These people tend to **not** have a direct stake in the schools. What is needed is an inclusive selection process, not an exclusive one." And, she added, "Committees should not be organized along crisis lines—or only when the school district wants help."

The Upper St. Clair (Pa.) Township School District has designed a well-organized procedure for selecting advisory committee members that is both inclusive and representative of the community. A brochure was sent to residents explaining the purposes and limitations of district advisory committees. Residents were encouraged to mail in a perforated form to become part of the "membership bank." Any community resident, age 16 or older, is eligible. Returned cards are filed according to four age categories: 16-21, 22-44, 45-64 and 65 and older. Prospective advisors have the option of including their occupation and special interest or area of expertise. Those with special skills are coded with an "S" and their application is cross-referenced. When the school board creates a new committee or has a vacancy to fill, a drawing is held, using

the appropriate age groups. The guidelines call for general committees to be composed of a cross-section of township residents. About one-half the membership chosen for a specialized committee has expertise in the topic to be studied.

When organizing for change, it is a good idea to include some of a school district's critics in the planning. James Walter and Jack McCall, writing in *School and Community* magazine, describe a successful effort to pass a bond issue in a small Missouri district. After six bond issue defeats in seven years, the school board appointed an advisory committee to reopen communication in the polarized community. "To avoid creating a 'Booster Club,' " the two men write, "the board asked community leaders to nominate persons for the committee who had opposed school policy in the past, but who would calmly and responsibly express their opposition." To provide balance on the committee, the board also sought nominations of persons who had never been involved in the schools and persons who could be counted on to support school policies. The 70 citizens who accepted the board's invitation worked for eight months analyzing the district and making recommendations. The following year, two bond issues were passed.

In *The Open Partnership: Equality in Running the Schools*, author Charlotte Ryan describes the ideal committee as one that has both open and equal membership. Such a committee is open to students, teachers, parents, citizens and administrators—in short, any group that is likely to be affected by the decision. "Since change in institutions depends on change in individuals," Ryan writes, "it is important that all who will be affected by the decisions involved have an opportunity to share in making them, if change is to be effective." Equal membership, Ryan added, is a characteristic that is learned when people who are working together "come to appreciate each other's different perspectives and knowledge."

Ryan said good partnerships are also characterized by multiple leadership. "A chairman or leader may be elected," she said, "but the official leader or convener need not feel sole responsibility to provide direction or information." An open atmosphere encourages people "to take the lead in the discussion, fact-finding or analysis in different ways at different times," she continued, "no matter what their roles may be at other times."

Guidelines for Advisory Committees

The kiss of death for a district-wide advisory committee is to create such a committee without a clear mandate. Even general committees should be given a task at the outset, so members do not feel they are

wasting their time. Orientation and training are important, but they should not be allowed to become the sole purpose of the committee. In a study of advisory committees in a large county-wide school system, positive and negative comments were collected from committee members. One of the negative comments, stated by a member of an area advisory committee, was, "Too much time [is] spent 'educating' us, instead of addressing major issues. By the time we are considered well informed enough to form an opinion, the year is over, frustrations are heightened, and a feeling of futility has set in."

Another trap to avoid is giving the committee members the impression they have more authority than they actually do. The *Education U.S.A.* survey asked school districts that use advisory committees to describe how much power or authority the committees have. Without exception, the committees were advisory only. This is not to say the committees are not influential. In the words of Albany (Minn.) Area Schools Supt. Duane Hill, "It's pretty difficult for the school board to reject a committee's advice." Still, in some instances, it **is** necessary to reject the committee's recommendations. Except in a few rare cases where school boards have formally delegated authority to a separate group, the boards are legally responsible for policy decisions and must retain ultimate authority over those decisions.

To avoid pitfalls like these, and to provide uniformity among advisory committees, many school boards have developed guidelines to govern the creation and operation of such committees. The Milwaukee Board of School Directors adopted comprehensive guidelines to govern board-initiated, administration-initiated and individual school-community advisory groups. As described by Milwaukee Supt. Lee McMurrin, the policies governing board-initiated committees state that:

- Board-initiated advisory committees will be district-wide in scope;
- Committee members will be advised at the outset that their powers are advisory;
- Members will be appointed by the school board president;
- Committee membership will ensure representation of the entire community;
- The committee will receive a letter of invitation stating the purpose and scope of the committee and the length of time each member is being asked to serve;
- The letter will either designate a chairman or specify that the

committee elect its chairman;

- The letter will specify the time and place of the first meeting, the dates on which reports are to be submitted, and the date by which the committee should complete its task;

- The superintendent or designee will serve the committee as a resource or liaison (any staff liaisons shall serve as nonvoting members of the committee);

- Board members are encouraged to participate in advisory committees as nonvoting and nonoffice holding members;

- A specific budget will be established if the duties of the committee require expenditures of money;

- All committee meetings are open to the public and a minimum of five days public notice should be given prior to each meeting;

- The superintendent and staff are expected to review and respond to committee recommendations presented to the board;

- After the board acts on the committee's report, the committee will be considered dissolved, and a letter recognizing the contributions of the committee will be sent to each member.

The key policies governing administration-initiated advisory groups in Milwaukee are that such groups should not compete with board-initiated or school-level committees, and that studies done by the committees and their recommendations should be reported to the board. If the committee includes employe groups, those representatives are to be selected by their bargaining unit. McMurrin said advisory groups created to comply with federal laws, like Title I, have a full-time staff member assigned to them.

The school-level advisory committee works under the guidance of the principal, who is expected to work closely with the local PTA or PTO to organize the committee. The guidelines encourage representation by teachers, students, classified personnel, parents and other community members. Parents of children in the school are to comprise a majority of the committee. Each group that is represented should select its own members. In schools that have separate advisory committees for federal programs, like Head Start, the policies encourage these committees to be represented on the full school committees.

The committees are expected to meet at least four times a year, and to

communicate with their constituents with newsletters and posters. The policies also establish a "chain of command" which the committees may use to gain additional information or to act upon a request. In Milwaukee, the chain is the local school principal, an administrative specialist at the district level, the superintendent and, ultimately, the Board of School Directors.

Communicating Within the Hierarchy

The Beaverton (Ore.) School District has used popularly elected advisory committees for each of its 37 schools since the district was reorganized in 1960. The three-member committees, by statute, are authorized to determine the use of school property for civic purposes; to recommend improvements to school property; to advise the school board on the needs of the school; and, when desired, to recommend rejection of any teacher or administrator assigned to the school by the board. To strengthen communication between the local school committees, the administration and the school board, Beaverton regularly takes the following steps:

- Minutes of local committee meetings are reviewed each month by the school board.
- The administration and/or school board reviews each recommendation and responds in writing to the appropriate committee.
- Principals meet with local committees and give members visibility by introducing them at school functions, covering their activities in newsletters, briefing them on curriculum developments and working with them as needed.
- The superintendent furnishes committee members advance copies of board agendas, board minutes, newsletters and other documents that help give committee members a broad understanding of the total school district operation.
- Some members of local school committees are invited to serve on each district-level citizens advisory committee.
- Board members meet from time to time with local committees in the zones they represent.
- The board gives audience to any local committee as requested.

- The administration and board conduct an annual information workshop for newly-elected committee members.
- The superintendent holds briefing sessions for local school committees on special topics from time to time.
- Local school committee members are asked to express their views on district operations through a variety of channels.

Evaluating the Committee

Two underlying assumptions are integral to any successful school board advisory committee relationship. The first is that the committee's opinions will be respected and recommendations will be given serious consideration. The second assumption is that advisory committees have a right to receive an answer to their recommendations. The board should say which recommendations will be adopted. When recommendations are not adopted, the board should say **why not** for each one.

One pitfall to the use of advisory committees is that a school board can go overboard in creating advisory committees. When this happens, administrators become bogged down in filling committee requests for information. In such cases, the board may be abdicating its leadership responsibilities. To keep committees on the track and to guard against creating too much of a good thing, periodic evaluations of the committee structure can be helpful. The Upper St. Clair, Pa., school district has devised two evaluation forms. The first is to be completed by committee members and the superintendent or staff liaison to the committee. The second evaluates the committee from the perspective of the school board.

Citizen Advisory Committee Evaluation Form

- How well did the committee succeed in accomplishing its assignment?
- Did the committee seek help when needed?
- What were the difficulties experienced in actively involving all the members in the committee work?
- Did you feel that this committee was in conflict with any other school or community organization?

- In your opinion, are the guidelines for a citizen advisory committee clear and explicit?
- Was there strict adherence to the guidelines by all concerned? If not, why?
- Was there positive, two-way communication between the committee and the school district? If not, why?
- What were the total manhours of certified staff?
- What were the strengths of the committee?
- What were the weaknesses of the committee?
- What could have been done to improve the committee's effectiveness?
- How can this evaluation format be improved?

Board of Education Evaluation Form

- How well did the committee succeed in accomplishing its assignment?
- Did the committee adhere to the guidelines? Explain.
- Was the committee work helpful to the school board? Explain.
- Do you believe that the additional workload involving the committee work for the superintendent and/or designee was justified?
- What was the additional workload for you as a board member?
- Was two-way communication enhanced by the work of this committee?
- In your judgment, what were the strengths and the weaknesses of this committee's work?
- What is your evaluation of the committee's recommendations?

The Problem-Solving Process

Although the solutions to individual problems facing a school district may differ, the process used to reach those solutions may be similar and repeatable. An advisory committee can conduct its work more efficiently and effectively if it discovers the common traits of the process, rather than "reinventing the wheel" each time a new problem presents itself.

Larry Winecoff and Conrad Powell have developed a process specifically for use by school-community groups of 35 to 40 people. It also has applications for advisory committees of any size. The process is described in *Focus: Seven Steps to Community Involvement in Educational Problem Solving*. The seven steps are:

- Recognize the problem;
- Assess the problem;
- Clarify the problem and set priorities;
- Set goals;
- Develop a planning guide;
- Plan the tasks;
- Check on effectiveness.

To recognize the problem, Winecoff and Powell suggest that participants think over comments they have heard in recent months from students, teachers, parents, administrators or community members "that indicate something is not operating as well as it ought to, or that something is missing from the school or school program." Each person is asked to list three statements indicating a concern. The source expressing the concern, such as a student or a group of parents, should also be listed.

Members who have listed three or four indicators then gather in groups of five or six to compare lists and determine which indicators point to the same problems and which problem areas are indicated most often. Each group should decide on one problem to study. It should be a problem every member of the group considers important.

In *Together: Schools And Communities*, Miriam Clasby writes that the "problem" does not necessarily have to be something that is wrong. "It applies to any situation where change is desired," she says. In place of

Community Control of the Budget

Local school committees in Lansing, Mich., have direct control of a portion of their budget, which allows parents and staff to spend money where the need is greatest. The Citizen Involvement Committee (CIC) is given a per pupil allotment to cover all instructional expenses other than teacher salaries. Each school assesses the needs of its children and apportions funds for textbooks, library books, musical instruments and other instructional materials.

The CIC may spend some of the money on paraprofessionals, instead of textbooks, says Lansing's information director, John Marrs. Also, two elementary schools may vote to share a guidance counselor. Funds may be carried over from one year to the next for a major purpose, like adding study areas in the library. And CICs also control all compensatory funds coming to their school through Title I and any similar state programs.

What is the payoff? "We are reasonably sure this system is increasing the level of achievement of children in the elementary schools," says Marrs. "We have seen a definite, continuous rise in achievement during the past three years—particularly in math and reading—which is one of the system-wide objectives," he explains. (Achievement tests have not yet been given to the upper grades.)

The Lansing system is called "responsible autonomy." The school board still sets the overall budget, educational goals and pupil-teacher ratio, but the local CICs design a program for their school based on established needs. The dollar amount is not great. Marrs estimates the schools get about $26 per pupil out of a total $1400 per pupil allotment. But with those funds, the CIC can choose which textbooks to use (from a state-approved list) and set other local priorities. They key to success, according to Marrs, is that the citizens control real dollars. "There isn't anything artificial about it," he said.

the word "problem," one can insert "concern, need, a new hope or expectation."

In step two—assessing the problem—the group tries to get more specific information about its nature. It is tempting, once a problem is identified, to immediately look for solutions. The hazard to this approach is that the group may attack the symptoms, rather than the problem. Instead, the group should engage in a more extensive investigation so the problem can be defined precisely. Such investigations can include interviews with people affected by the problem, observation by two or more people over a period of time, and surveys or questionnaires that sample the attitudes of a large number of people.

The authors also recommend using Pocoff's Group Sampling Technique, which brings together representatives from various groups to brainstorm possible causes of the problem. Those who brainstorm should represent a cross-section of all people affected by the problem. The advantage of this technique is that it can be completed in a few hours and requires active, personal involvement of individuals who then have a vested interest in helping find a solution. Quantitative data, like achievement test scores, drop-out rates and population shifts, can also be helpful in defining the problem. Such information is available from government agencies, public schools and national organizations. The authors caution that groups should attempt to identify **all** possible sources of data to avoid focusing on only one aspect of the problem.

The third step—clarify the problem and set priorities—involves determining what the situation would be like if the problem no longer existed. This "ideal state" represents the target. The group must next determine what actions are necessary to move from the problems described to a point where the problem is removed or reduced. Each action should be ranked according to its importance.

Setting goals, the fourth step, requires formulating positive, declarative statements of what the group intends to accomplish by solving the problem. It can sometimes be a simple restatement of the need. If the problem is a lack of parent involvement in the school, the authors suggest that the goal might be "to increase the amount of involvement which parents have in the school, including both amount of time spent and input into decisions and programs." A complex problem may require several goals, which should be ranked in priority order.

The planning guide, step five, describes the types of activities that must take place to achieve the goals. Objectives should be set for each activity, describing who the activity is for and when and how it must be done. A sample objective would be to hold an open house for parents in the spring that at least one-half the parents will attend. A resource grid is then developed which lists horizontally across the top all of the anticipated services needed to reach the goal. The vertical side of the grid lists

the agencies, organizations and individuals that offer the services. Filling in the grid reveals where resources are needed and where they are duplicated.

Task planning, step six, identifies the tasks necessary to fulfill the objective. Winecoff and Powell recommend that a group design the step-by-step procedure to ensure that all vital tasks are identified, that all necessary people are involved, and that the tasks are properly coordinated. The responsibility for execution of the plan should be assigned to a single person. Also, a completion date should be set to minimize procrastination.

The final step, checking on effectiveness, is an ongoing monitoring of the entire process. One person should be assigned this responsibility, and should find out: Are the goals still appropriate and feasible in light of new data? Are the objectives still moving toward accomplishment of the goal? Are the tasks still feasible and appropriate for meeting the objectives? Are the tasks being completed on schedule?

A final check should be made to see if each goal was reached and if the problem was solved. If the problem remains, the authors list three options:

- Design a new plan, repeating all the steps;
- Redesign or reimplement part of the original design;
- Repeat part or all of the same plan

Phi Delta Kappa Model

Phi Delta Kappa has developed a process model for involving the community in establishing educational goals and objectives for a local school system. At separate meetings, randomly selected citizens, students and teachers are each asked to rank a series of 18 educational goals in order of importance. The goal statements were developed by Phi Delta Kappa, and additional goals may be added for consideration. After the goals are ranked, follow-up meetings are scheduled to allow the students, teachers and citizens to rate how well the school system is meeting the educational goals.

The responses of the three groups are turned over to a school district task force, composed of a lay chairperson, teacher representatives, a secondary and an elementary principal, a central administrator, a parent representative and a student. The task force compiles a report to the school board and presents the report at a public meeting.

Dealing with School Officials: A Political Primer

Once a parent group has determined its target problem, it may want to stage possible conversation exchanges with principals or school boards to give parents practice in responding to excuses for inaction. Below is a list of possible excuses and suggested responses:

- **We're the experts.** "You do not understand all the complex issues involved." **Responses:** Parents know their children's needs better than anyone. School officials are paid by the taxpayers to serve the needs of children and the community.
- **Denial of the problem.** "Do you have any proof?" **Response:** Bring evidence, like first-hand reports by parents or students.
- **Blaming the student.** "We really can't do too much with this type of student." **Response:** School officials should design an environment that meets the needs of all children.
- **Blaming other parents.** "Those parents don't seem to care about their own children." **Response:** School officials are responsible for what happens at school.
- **Delaying.** "We need time to plan." **Response:** Ask for the plans in writing, a timetable and the name of the person responsible for implementing the plan.
- **An unimportant problem.** "There are many more pressing issues." **Response:** The problem is important because it affects children directly.
- **No money.** "Yes, that's needed, but we're facing budget cuts already." **Response:** Parents feel this need is a priority. Perhaps something else should be cut to make room.

Parents Organizing to Improve Schools
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The task force, whose chairman has been trained by a Phi Delta Kappa consultant, will, in turn, train a group of teachers to write program level performance objectives. These objectives are designed to ensure that the goals are met. They are developed over a period of six months to one year. Because community attitudes and needs change over time, Phi Delta Kappa recommends that the goal-ranking phase be repeated about every five years.

A Study in Point: DeKalb County, Ga.

A county-wide school system of 87,000 students near Atlanta, Ga., has been particularly successful in involving large numbers of citizens in long-range planning, goal-setting and evaluation. The DeKalb County School System has involved citizens in major studies of the schools four times since 1954. The most recent study, conducted in 1975-76, was known as the Optimum Program of Education for DeKalb (OPED). It involved 3,000 citizens working on 20 committees over a year's time.

OPED was administered by a 24-member steering committee that included a lay chairman, a student, the president of the county PTA council, the chairman of the board of education, local business executives and members of the schools' professional staff. Each of the 20 study committees contained approximately two-thirds lay membership (including at least one student) and one-third school staff. Most of the lay citizens were selected by the steering committee from nominations submitted by PTA presidents, professional staff and steering committee members. Some members were selected from volunteers, and one member of each committee was selected randomly by computer.

The program was designed to be an update of the district's wide-ranging 1968-69 "Study for the Decade of the Seventies," which produced short- and long-range goals and a master plan for educational improvements during the 1970s. OPED committees were briefed on the status of each recommendation from the earlier study. Then they were requested "to examine the current status of educational programs and the manner in which the school system is being administered," said Supt. James H. Hinson Jr., "and to compile recommendations for improvements that would lead to an optimal program of education for DeKalb children." Reports were to be presented to the steering committee by February 1976 so the recommendations could be considered in formulating the next year's school budget.

The reports were summarized and published in a 63-page paperback book for broad dissemination to the general public. The source documents were printed and placed in each school library. According to the book, the goals committee recommended that the system implement as

many goals as were sound, educationally meaningful and economically feasible and "report on its progress to the members of these committees no later than June 1978." The committee also requested formation of "a formal standing committee for constant citizen input with revolving and nonrecurrent membership so as not to become inbred."

According to Andrew J. Olsen, director of communications for the DeKalb schools, "the vast majority" of the recommendations from each study are implemented. Usually, the reason certain recommendations are not implemented is because of high cost or because priorities change. An example of the latter would be a proposed new school that is not built because enrollment projections changed. How is DeKalb's system of citizen involvement working? Quite well, if election results are any indication. DeKalb taxpayers have defeated only one bond issue in 25 years—and that one passed three months later!

Another Case in Point: Milwaukee

Milwaukee turned a court order to desegregate its schools into a positive opportunity to involve its citizens and improve its educational program. This was accomplished with a series of "magnet" schools which were developed by district staff in conjunction with a citizen-dominated "Committee of 100," whose members were elected from grassroots meetings at local schools.

The process began in January 1976 with the court order to desegregate. During the next two months, Supt. Lee McMurrin and his staff developed the preliminary structure of the magnet schools, which were designed to voluntarily attract students away from their neighborhood schools to the racially mixed magnet schools. The magnets also gave parents a greater voice in determining the type of education their child would receive. The alternative schools included fundamental and open education, a school for the gifted and a bilingual (English-German) school.

The proposed magnet schools were described in a special newspaper supplement two months later, and residents were encouraged to attend public meetings on the plan in their area. The next week, orientation meetings were held in each high school—followed two days later by elections at every school. The newspaper supplement encouraged parents, teachers, business, labor and local community organizations to attend the elections. Each school elected five parent/citizens, one school staff representative and student (one junior high, three senior high) representatives to a cluster advisory council. (A cluster is one high school and its feeder elementary and junior high schools.) Each cluster elected seven representatives to the Committee of 100.

Committees at the school, cluster and district levels were asked to review the proposals and make recommendations to the school board for the following September. Subsequent meetings focused on long-range planning for alternative schools and on ways to accomplish true integration as well as desegregation.

In July, Federal Judge John Reynolds ordered the implementation of a plan—approved unanimously by the school board—which called for desegregating one-third of the schools by September 1976, and one-third in each of the following two years.

In the meantime, an information/rumor control center was established, operated jointly by school staff and volunteers. Other volunteers went door to door, McMurrin said, to convince parents to send their children to specialty schools. In the first year of the plan, 67 schools (or nearly half the district) had desegregated voluntarily.

The Milwaukee community continues to be involved in school planning and implementation. Business and industry representatives serve on 27 committees that are developing career specialty courses at each of the 15 high schools and in several community locations. Students will attend the high school which offers the cluster that interests them. Clusters include finance and commerce; visual and performing arts; tourism; food service; recreation and computer data processing.

Chapter 4.

The Government: An Involvement Catalyst

Citizen participation is irreversible. Federal legislation aimed at target populations has created lobbying groups. It won't go away.

Miriam Clasby,
Institute for Responsive Education

The big push to involve parents in the schools, both as volunteers and as partners in planning and decision making, can be traced to the poverty programs of the mid-1960s. The largest program with the most extensive parental involvement is Title I, which provides federal funds to supplement the instructional programs of children who live in low income areas. A companion program, Head Start, seeks to provide preschool, low income children with the academic preparation and social skills they need for public school.

The premise underlining parental involvement in both of these programs is that informed, involved parents can enhance the gains students make at school by working with them at home. Parents living near the poverty level often feel they are failures, and such attitudes can pervade the home environment. When parents are invited by the school district to give their opinions as equals, the resulting pride spills over to their attitudes and action toward their children. Helene Amos, Title I specialist at the U. S. Office of Education (USOE), said training parents "helps with school discipline, helps the children's concepts of themselves, makes the children proud of their parents and makes the parents better parents." Parents are in an ideal position to evaluate school programs, she added, "because parents know their kids and know what teaching methods are working." Involved parents have a vested interest in the success of a program, so they can help "sell" it to the community, she said.

The success of parent involvement in Title I and Head Start has led the federal government to include an involvement component in many other federal programs, like the 1975 Education for All Handicapped Children Act. The states, too, are beginning to mandate parent and community involvement, in such areas as early childhood education, bilingual-bicultural education, long-range planning and school district accreditation. This chapter describes the major provisions of federal legislation that require involvement. It also includes a brief look at some of the programs state legislatures and departments of education are using to promote community involvement in the schools.

Title I

Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act provides federal funds to help "educationally deprived" children living in low income areas. The funds are intended to provide instructional help above and beyond what each child would normally receive. Title I schools are determined by the number of low income families in the attendance area. Once a school is designated, the children served are those with the greatest educational need, whether or not those children are poor.

Title I funds may be used to hire specialty teachers or teacher aides or to pay for additional materials, like reading machines and books. The structure and content of each program is determined at the school district level, with the advice of the district parent advisory council (PAC). Since 1974, federal law has required PACs for each Title I school, as well as at the district level. Council members are selected by parents living in the school attendance area, including parents of children in private schools. A majority of the council members must be parents of children served by the program. Other council members may be teachers, administrators or nonparents, but they must live in the school district or, in the case of the local school council, must live in the school attendance area.

The main duties of the council members are to advise in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the Title I program. This broad requirement enables PACs to become involved in budgeting and curriculum decisions and the selection of various enrichment programs. Although the federal law and regulations are specific about the mechanics of the advisory committees, each local council may determine the areas in which it wants to become involved.

For example, the Dallas district PAC participates in needs assessment. Each council member is given a sheet with 20 possible needs, ranging from reading to discipline to emotional stability. Each member ranks, in priority order, the top three needs that member feels should be

stressed through the Title I program. The Peoria, Ill., local school PACs have stressed ways to involve Title I parents. One school asked each parent to bring their prekindergarten children to be tested, to ensure that parents came to the building at least once. Other Peoria PACs have scheduled book fairs, demonstrations, lectures and field trips that involve parents.

To ensure that parents have an opportunity for meaningful involvement, Title I requires that PAC members receive training. The state of Washington has compiled a series of handbooks to help local districts involve parents. The training handbook suggests a series of activities to build management expertise in Title I parents. The first is an orientation workshop to explain Title I federal and state regulations, the purpose of parent involvement and the role of the PAC. Councils which are just getting started may also need training in recruiting members, management and leadership, communication skills and interrelationships with local agencies. "As the PAC becomes stronger and more experienced," the handbook continues, "it may choose to train itself in certain areas of Title I operations, such as: needs assessment, project design, target school selection, project participation, evaluation or monitoring." Title I funds may be used for such training costs as consultant fees, transportation, baby-sitting and tuition.

Title I funds may also be used to train parents to be volunteers and paid teacher aides. The training and job opportunities provide upward mobility for people living in poverty. USOE's Helene Amos said some aides have gone back to school and become teachers; and some have been elected to the school board.

The final federal safeguard to ensure parent involvement is a requirement that the district PAC chairperson sign the application for further Title I funds. Since this single signature could possibly be obtained through pressure tactics, Title I officials prefer to see applications which list the number of PAC meetings, the parents' recommendations and how the district responded to the recommendations, in addition to the PAC chairperson's signature.

Head Start

The second major anti-poverty program, Head Start, was born out of the belief that many poor children did not do well in school because they did not have the kind of preschool learning experiences commonly available to more affluent children. In addition to academic stimulation, the program provides medical, dental and social services to 3- to 5-year-olds to prevent or correct problems which could interfere with learning. Included in the comprehensive package of services are nutri-

tion (lunch and snacks) for the children and early childhood education for the parents.

Head Start programs are run by school districts, private agencies and churches. Each program must have a Policy Advisory Committee (PAC), composed of a parent majority and other community residents. Richard Johnson, parent involvement specialist at HEW, describes the Head Start PACs as having "concurring responsibility and power." The program's board of directors makes the initial decisions on budgets and hiring staff, but each decision must be reviewed and approved by the PAC.

Parents are also encouraged to be involved as volunteers. Johnson estimated that parents volunteer two days a week in the average Head Start program. Volunteers are crucial to the funding of most Head Start centers. The federal government funds 80% of the cost of the center, and the local community is expected to pay 20%. But the 20% can be paid through contributed services. Each hour a volunteer donates in the classroom is computed at the minimum wage, said Rossie Kelly, USOE's volunteer specialist. A dollar value is also attached to any classroom space that is donated by a church or school district. Donated dental work and psychological services are also computed into the 20%, she said. Some of the largest Head Start programs hire a volunteer coordinator; in smaller centers, all coordination is done by volunteers. If a program gets more volunteers than it can use, parent volunteers come first. "Too many adult volunteers are not good," Kelly explained. "The teacher can wind up supervising the adults."

Head Start encourages teachers to include classroom volunteers in staff meetings and in any training sessions. As in Title I, Head Start stresses upward mobility, so parent classroom volunteers often become paid teacher aides. Other volunteer opportunities include sewing and laundering sheets the children use for naps, making playground equipment, renovating the building and raising money for a bus or classroom equipment.

In addition to the decision-making and volunteer opportunities, Head Start centers are encouraged to offer early childhood education and parenting classes for parents. "Poverty can so overwhelm the single parent that he/she may not interact with the child at home," USOE's Johnson said. "Without the parents, Head Start would become glorified day care—because sending the children back to the same home situation would wipe out the positive experiences they gain at the center," he explained.

Follow Through

The Follow Through program was enacted by Congress in 1967 when

it became apparent that the gains made by disadvantaged children in Head Start programs were often lost when children entered public school. Like Head Start, Follow Through stresses parental involvement and provides comprehensive health and social services. It is geared to children of low income families in the first through the third grades. Unlike Head Start, Follow Through is a small scale, experimental program. Each Follow Through site is under the supervision of a research-oriented sponsor. HEW also hopes to discover effective classroom techniques to use with disadvantaged children. Each of the 21 different approaches uses individualized instruction, which requires many adults in the classroom. Like Head Start, Follow Through uses many parent volunteers and paid aides.

According to Rosemary Wilson, director of the Follow Through Division at HEW, the required Policy Advisory Committees have responsibility for "developing and approving the application for the Follow Through grant, establishing criteria for the selection of salaried personnel and assisting in their recruitment; listening to and acting upon parent grievances; and organizing parent activities that foster wider participation of parents."

A federally-funded study, *Follow Through: A Story of Educational Change*, says many Follow Through projects found it necessary to create a position for a parent coordinator to facilitate parent involvement. The coordinator visits parents in the home, accompanies parents to the school and in some cases, arranges baby-sitting services so parents can volunteer in the classroom. Some schools have created a "Parent Room" in an unused classroom or office which parents can use as a spot to relax, leave younger children to play while they work in the classroom, and to have as "their space" in the school. Others have created toy lending libraries which bring parents into the school and add something to the home environment at the same time. The parents are trained to use toys to reinforce what children learn in school, while also enriching parent-child interaction.

Helping the Handicapped

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 guarantees a "free and appropriate public education" for handicapped children between the ages of three and 18 by Sept. 1, 1978; for those between ages three and 21, by Sept. 1, 1980. Each child is to have an individualized education program (IEP) that is developed cooperatively by the local school district, the child's teachers, parents or guardians, and, "where appropriate," the child.

The written statement should include the child's current educational

Family Rights and Privacy Act

A federal law passed in 1974 gives parents the right to review the educational records of their children, to contest any records they feel are inaccurate, and to limit access to those records by nonschool personnel. Each school district must formulate a policy and procedure for parents to review the records and must notify parents annually of their rights. School officials are expected to assist parents in the interpretation of test data, if parents so request, and to furnish copies of the records at nominal expense. Districts which do not comply with the law can be denied federal funds. The right to review records is transferred to the student at the age of 18. Students are entitled to all parts of their record except financial information submitted by their parents and psychiatric information used only for medical treatment.

A parent or student who feels part of the record is misleading or is an invasion of privacy may file a complaint, asking that the record be amended. If the school refuses to amend, the parent or student is entitled to a hearing, conducted by a person who has "no direct interest in the outcome." If the hearing goes against the family, the student or parent may submit a written statement of disagreement, which the district is required to maintain as part of the student's record.

Information in the record is not to be released to a third party (other than teachers or others directly involved with the student) without the prior written consent of the parent or student. Parents are to be informed of the nature of any information to be released about the student, the person making the request and the reason for the request. The law exempts directory information and notes made by a teacher for the exclusive use of the teacher or a substitute.

performance, annual goals and short-term objectives, and a statement of the specific educational services that will be provided. Each child is to be placed in the least restrictive environment possible. The IEP is to be reviewed and revised at least annually. Those children who cannot be educated in the public schools are to be served by private agencies or institutions—with the cost borne either by the school district or the state.

Parents also have the right to examine all of their child's records and are entitled to written prior notice of any plans to change the identification, evaluation or educational placement of their child. The notice is to be written in the parents' native language, if at all possible. Parents have the right to voice their complaints at an "impartial due process" hearing. If they are not satisfied by the outcome of the hearings, they can appeal to the state education agency or, ultimately, through civil action in the courts. The parents also have the right to review their child's educational records, and to obtain a second evaluation of their child, under certain circumstances, at the school district's expense.

The law also requires that each state have an advisory panel, appointed by the governor or other authorized state officials. The panel should include handicapped individuals, teachers, parents of handicapped children, state and local education officials and administrators of programs for handicapped children. The panel advises the state on unmet needs, procedures for distribution of money, and comments on proposed rules and regulations developed by the state.

State-Mandated Involvement

A number of states are beginning to encourage or require citizen involvement in the schools through state legislation and department of education regulations. Florida and California are the two states with the most extensive mandated involvement. Many other states, however, have begun to include citizen advisory committees when new programs are created.

Florida

In 1973, the Florida legislature passed a law requiring school districts to establish school advisory committees, which include "parents and students, and should be broadly representative of the community." Each district had the option of choosing either school-level committees or one district-level committee. Several of the larger districts created both.

The law prohibits the advisory committees from having powers or

duties "reserved by law to the school board." It encourages meaningful involvement by mandating participation of advisory committees in the development of an annual report to the state. This report must include:

- Population data relevant to the school;
- Results of school assessment programs;
- Fiscal and cost accounting information, including the budget;
- A summary of the attitudes toward school held by students, teachers, administrators and parents;
- Results of the school's effectiveness in achieving its goals;
- Plans and programs for school-level professional improvement,
- Effectiveness of school advisory committees, where they exist, or other parent-school organizations;
- Use of the school for community purposes, and use of community facilities for school purposes;
- Recommendations for school improvements for the following year.

The school board is asked to evaluate the effectiveness of all its advisory committees and submit the evaluation along with its annual report to the Florida Dept. of Education. The law requires the department to review all reports and to provide the state board of education and the legislature with "an annual appraisal as to the effectiveness of school advisory committees."

The state has also given its stamp of approval to the concept of community schools. The Community School Act of 1970 provides matching state funds to pay salaries of community school coordinators in local districts. State funds are also available to carry out programs proposed by coordinating councils, made up of representatives of a local community college and a school district. Jeanne Brock of the state education department said coordinating councils perform needs assessments and determine priorities in their communities. When programs are designed to meet those needs, the community applies for community service program funds. (Thirty-nine of the state's 67 counties have applied for funds through this program.)

Brock said the community schools encourage more senior citizens to

volunteer in the schools. Some programs provide hot lunches to the elderly. Schools that were closed have been turned into human resource centers, she said, offering health and employment services and educational and recreational programs. The state advisory council on community education includes representatives from the PTA, League of Women Voters, the state council on aging and the parks and recreation department.

Florida law also provides that state assessment results for individual schools be published, and that collective bargaining sessions be open to the public.

California

Opening up the schools to greater community involvement was begun in California in 1973 with passage of the Early Childhood Education (ECE) law. Under ECE, school advisory committees are involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of educational programs for children in kindergarten through the third grade.

The committees include teachers and administrators, but 51% of their membership must be parents. The basic goals of ECE are to individualize education by moving towards a 10 to 1 adult-child ratio in the classroom, and to make education more accountable through measurable objectives. The format for reaching the ECE goals, however, is up to each individual school and its advisory council.

Schools that adopt ECE are "rewarded" with an additional $140 per pupil in state aid. New schools are added to the program every year; their selection is dependent upon how well the district has done with the ECE schools it already has. Marion Joseph of the state education department explained that monitoring teams visit ECE schools and evaluate them with a weighted formula. The formula includes the quality of the ECE plan and its implementation, the degree of involvement of parents and teachers, and student achievement in the program. By the 1976-77 school year, 52% of California's elementary schools had implemented ECE programs.

California also has strong advisory committees in all schools with bilingual and Title I programs (which both receive state funds). "The state education department is trying to promote the notion that school site committees should represent all children, with subcommittees to deal with specific legislation" (such as bilingual and Title I), Joseph said. Under such a system, the committees do not wind up competing with each other to the detriment of children. She added that accountability, California-style, means involving teachers and parents in a partnership to determine what teachers are to be held accountable for.

State Summaries

The following capsule descriptions of community involvement activities in the states were compiled from responses to an *Education U.S.A.* survey of state education departments:

Colorado: The state's accountability law mandates state and district advisory committees to propose goals and objectives and to assist in long-range planning. The bilingual-bicultural law mandates district and state advisory committees and the career education law requires a state advisory committee.

Hawaii: A state law established lay advisory councils for each administrative district in Hawaii's single statewide school district. The superintendent of education has directed each school to establish a school advisory committee, composed of teachers, parents, students and community representatives. The school committees are to assist in identifying needs and planning improvements.

Indiana: Textbook selection committees in each school district must be composed of at least 40% parents, with the other 60% being teachers and administrators. The adoption committee's recommendations are forwarded to the superintendent, who makes recommendations to the school board.

Kansas: The state's special education law permits due process hearings for parents whose children are being considered for special education. Similar guarantees are contained in a law governing suspensions and expulsions. Other laws encourage citizen participation in evaluation of teachers, and through public hearings on state rules and regulations.

Louisiana: The State Dept. of Education's Bureau of Child Development held eight regional Parent Public Forums to receive input on educational goals and needs, to be included in the state plan on child development programs.

Maine: A state law gives postsecondary students the right to observe and give input to collective bargaining talks at their college or university.

Massachusetts: A state law requires each school committee (school board) to meet at least every other month with a five-member elected student advisory committee. There are also one state and 11 regional student advisory councils. The state council elects a high school student as a full voting member of the state board of education. The Massachusetts special education and bilingual laws require parent involvement, and the state has a strong open meetings law. Parents may have a course added to the high school curriculum through a petition signed by at least 20 parents.

Michigan: The state's special education law requires that parents be members of the Educational Planning and Placement Committee for their child. Parents are also required to attend all clinical treatment of children with psychological, speech and hearing or reading problems. There are parent advisory committees for special education, and citizen advisory committees for career education and area vocational centers.

Minnesota: The Planning, Evaluation and Reporting to the Public law requires every school district, by 1978, to set goals and objectives for its educational program, a procedure for reaching the objectives and an annual evaluation of the program. The law encourages districts to set up curriculum advisory committees to participate in developing educational policy, the instructional plan, the evaluation and in reporting to the public. Based on the evaluations, school boards are expected to develop school improvement plans for areas where goals have not been met.

Montana: Parents of children in special education are involved in designing and reviewing programs and must approve changes in their child's program. Vocational education programs have community advisory committees and youth groups. Postsecondary students are allowed to observe collective bargaining sessions between faculty and administration.

Nebraska: The Dept. of Education requires districts to undergo a self-study every seven years to maintain state accreditation. The district may choose its own evaluation methods, but the department strongly encourages the involvement of students, staff, parents and the total community "to the greatest extent possible." Nebraska also requires citizen involvement in the implementation of its accountability law.

New York: A 1969 state decentralization law required New York City to create 32 community school boards to set policies for all elementary, intermediate and junior high schools. These community boards provide more citizen involvement in a system of more than one million students.

Ohio: An advisory committee on the Redesign and Renewal of Teacher Education advises those programs in the state. The committee includes parents, public school teachers and administrators and college professors.

Oregon: A state law gives postsecondary students the right to observe and make suggestions at collective bargaining sessions for teachers at their institutions.

Pennsylvania: Community members, students, teachers and administrators are involved in a state-mandated, long-range planning process. Each district's five-year plan describes goals and objectives for areas like curriculum and equal opportunity. A Professional Standards and Practices Commission, made up of specialists and citizens, advises the state board and state education department regarding teacher preparation and certification. The state department is funding 12 demonstration projects called Project 81, which involve citizens in defining the skills and abilities students need for adult life. These projects also encourage community members' participation in educational planning.

South Carolina: School finance legislation requires local school advisory councils, which are to participate in preparing an annual report on student needs and priorities for state funds.

Texas: School districts must be accredited to receive state funds. The state requires citizen involvement in the goal-setting portion of the accreditation process. Districts must also perform a self study and develop a long-range plan, activities which also include citizens. Texas has a number of state-level advisory committees which include citizens.

Utah: The state's community education law provides funds "to engage the public in determining the role the schools shall play in solving individual and community problems." The state board of educa-

tion has made involving the community in decision making its top priority, and has instructed its divisions to submit action plans to reach this priority. A cooperative statewide project involving the PTA, state board and local school boards is seeking to determine what schools should and should not be doing in parent education and in preparing students for adulthood.

Washington: A student learning objectives law encourages community participation in the identification of the appropriate objectives.

Wyoming: Long-range planning and needs assessment are two requirements of the state accreditation process. Most local districts involve parents and the community extensively in the needs assessments.

Chapter 5.

Citizen-Initiated Groups

Parents need to have their own separate power base. They need to come in with some equality. This doesn't mean that the relationship has to be adversarial. Our whole mission is to redress the imbalance of power.

Carl Marburger,
National Committee for
Citizens in Education

School-oriented groups that are organized by citizens, rather than educators, have traditionally fit into one of three categories: the single-issue or crisis-oriented group, like one opposed to busing or sex education; the school-affiliated group, like the Parent-Teacher Assn. (PTA); and the special interest, noncrisis group, like parents of retarded or minority children.

In many communities, a new, action-oriented type of citizens organization is emerging that is broader in scope than the special interest citizen groups. In many cases, it is an activist chapter of the PTA; in other communities, the organization may have no national affiliation. These new groups have no specific cause, but are formed to give members a voice in decision making for the schools.

Starting a Group

The first step in organizing a citizens group is to check and see if a group with similar aims already exists. There is no point in duplicating effort and competing for volunteers. An organized group will have human and financial resources already available, and the organizational structure will be established. If the group is not action-oriented, it might be willing to form an action subcommittee. In *Parents Organizing to Improve Schools*, published by the National Committee for Citizens in

Education (NCCE), author Happy Fernandez suggests asking the following questions before forming a new, independent group:

- Who controls the established organization? Parents? Teachers? Principals? Who selects the leadership? Who votes on important issues?
- Is the existing organization afraid of or not formed for action?
- Has a clique or inside group gained such control that new people cannot work their way into leadership positions?
- If it is a parent/teacher group, who controls it if a strike is threatened—parents, teachers or principals?

Fernandez says many successful parent organizations give voting membership only to parents and guardians and offer nonvoting membership to other people. To determine how democratic the group is, she suggests checking the bylaws to see if elections are held regularly and if they offer a choice among candidates. If a decision is reached to form a separate group, she suggests meeting with the established group to explain the goals of the new group and to stress that both groups are needed and have roles to play. "Parents should never fight publicly with one another," she stresses. "They should present a united front to the school system."

To recruit members, parents can start with the parents of children in their child's class. Names of parents can be obtained from the child's teacher and a pot-luck dinner or evening meeting can be arranged. Another option is to attend a school board meeting to see what other parents are present or write a letter to the editor of the local newspaper, asking interested parents to write. Parents can also contact the school or a public librarian for the names of persons interested in the schools. The newspaper can also be scanned for meetings of other parent groups or community organizations that might have education committees.

After the organizers receive a response from even only a few people, a preliminary meeting can be held to discuss concerns. The date for an open meeting should be agreed upon, and flyers should be posted in stores, churches and community centers. The group should also ask principals to send a copy of the flyer home with each child.

Although action is the primary concern of the group, any new organization must take a little time to establish itself. Fernandez presents the following pointers:

- **Select leadership.** A new group may want to elect its first leaders

for short terms, like three months, so new people can step in if those chosen do not develop leadership abilities. The group may begin with a rotating presidency, which keeps it flexible and allows the best leader to emerge.

- **Choose a name.** The name should be short, easy to say and should attract attention. It should be chosen by the group as a whole and reflect the goals or special role of the group.

- **Find a meeting place.** Ideally, this should be a public place—either the school, a church, a community organization clubhouse or a library meeting room.

- **Skip formal bylaws.** Initial time and energy should be spent planning, fact-finding and talking to other parents. Rules can be agreed upon as the need arises, rather than at the outset.

- **Incorporate later, not sooner.** This step may be taken after the organization has begun to establish a track record. Waiting also gives the group a chance to find a lawyer who will do the job for nothing or at cost.

In seeking members, writer Virginia Corsi advises looking for the "doers." In an article in the Institute for Responsive Education newsletter, *Citizen Action in Education*, Corsi contends that most people fall into one of three categories: "the powerless, the critics and the doers. The apathy of the powerless majority reflects a feeling of inadequacy," she explains, "and the critics are nearly incurable." The doers, however, "require no leadership positions to get things done." It doesn't hurt to have a **few** critics, she added, because the critic can make the doer reevaluate plans for action. Corsi also favors acting quickly to retain the interests of the group. "Learning by doing is a valid educational premise," she says.

Once a group is organized, the primary task becomes selecting a problem to work on. Several considerations should be kept in mind. The most obvious point is that groups should focus on one problem at a time so available resources are not spread too thinly to be effective. Fernandez suggests several criteria that can be used in determining which problem will be the group's top priority:

- **Is it a problem that is urgent in the school?** It is easier to generate feeling and action around an urgent, highly visible problem.

- **Is it a problem that unites the parents in the group?** A new

A Short Course in Decoding Budgets

School district budgets are usually mammoth documents that can intimidate the interested citizen. But when examined item by item, they reveal much about the school board's priorities and the administration's management practices. In times of tight budgets, the conscientious citizen budget analyst can sometimes save more funds for children by calling attention to duplication or unnecessary expenditures. *The School Budget Is Your Business,* by Rhoda Dersh, is a comprehensive handbook published by the Public School Budget Study Project. The handbook takes the novice step by step through the basics of budget analysis.

It begins with a comparison of the district's current budget and the proposed budget for the next year. By subtraction and division, you can determine differences in expenditures, by dollar amount and percent, of line items like travel expenditures and administrative salaries. Dersh suggests circling any items whose percentage of increase is larger than that of the overall budget. Most districts publish a superintendent's message that explains key areas of the budget in narrative form. Such summaries will explain reasons for some of the increases or decreases, but they cannot include everything.

A next step is to compare actual expenditures from one year against the estimates of the preceding year. When computed for several different years, this exercise will reveal any areas which are consistently underestimated or overestimated. Areas with artificially low estimates can be supplemented by budget transfers—a routine school board action that usually goes unnoticed. Records of actual expenditures will usually be contained as a separate column in the budget document. If not, they are available in the audit each school district files with the state department of education.

Armed with a working knowledge of the budget, the citizen should schedule an interview with the school budget officer to learn about the district's internal (staff) budget process and its external process—which includes school board action, public hearings and other opportunities for citizen input. A copy of the district's budget calendar, and state laws and local policies governing the budget process, will give citizen groups enough background on the budget maze to enable them to influence the process.

group is a fragile organism that may not survive the stress of a divisive, controversial issue.

- **Is it a problem that this group of parents can do something about?** Some problems are solvable at the local school level, while others require long-range solutions through coalitions with other groups.

- **Is it a problem that interests each member of the group?** Solving the problem should give each member some satisfaction, or those who are not interested will eventually drop out.

- **Is it a problem that is okay to work on?** Some problems may present conflicts of interest for members of the group.

- **Is it a problem that can be solved in a relatively short period of time?** Winning small, specific changes builds group solidarity and provides the momentum needed to tackle tougher issues.

- **Is the problem a symptom or a root cause of low quality education?** The group may deliberately start with a symptom because those are easier to cure. In doing so, however, the group should be consciously aware that their actions will not solve the fundamental problem.

Traits of Successful Groups

What gives some groups staying power, while others come and go with the changing seasons? According to Carl Marburger, senior associate at NCCE, four essential elements of success are good leadership, persistence, "chutzpa" and commitment. Responsibilities should be shared, and an effort should be made to develop the leadership potential of each member.

Many short-lived community groups rise up out of a crisis and are based on a single issue. When the issue dies, so does the group. By contrast, a broad-based group can attract other interested citizens along with parents. These citizens can be the best members because their interest does not fade with their child's graduation.

On a similar note, Don Davies, president of the Institute for Responsive Education (IRE), says the most effective citizen groups are broad-based neighborhood organizations whose interests are not restricted to educational issues. Such groups appeal to a wider variety of people and

have more opportunities for support from foundations, Davies said. Research by IRE has convinced him there has been a "definite decline in the number of citizen-initiated school organizations over the past five years," but that broad-based groups stressing economic or neighborhood development "seem to be thriving."

A three-year IRE study is looking for ways citizen groups in the same community can share resources and information—a process Davies calls "networking." Local groups can share money-raising skills, staff and publications, he says. They can also share political clout through alliances on issues of common concern.

The PTA

For most of its 80 year history, the National Congress of Parents and Teachers (PTA) has shunned controversy. Local PTA groups used to devote their energies to bake sales and carnivals to raise money for school equipment, and they left running the schools to professional educators. But since 1972, the PTA's national bylaws have required the organization to "seek to participate in the decision-making process establishing school policy." Grace Baisinger, national president, is committed to the concept of shared decision making, and she believes the PTA's major role is one of advocacy. At the secondary level, the organization believes decisions should be shared with students as well as parents and teachers. Junior and senior high school students may be full voting members of parent-teacher-student groups. They pay the same dues and may hold any office except those limited by state law. (Some states will not let a minor be treasurer.)

Baisinger says the national group's interest in advocacy is being shared at the local level. "As I cover the state [PTA] conventions," she says, "I see much greater emphasis on substantive issues. The younger generation of parents grew up in the 1960s. They're determined they will be part of the decision-making."

She adds that the organization's service functions have value, but they should be related to advocacy. As a member of the Washington, D. C., PTA, Baisinger and others worked to get a grant for a pilot program to pay for guidance counselors in the elementary schools. Later, the group lobbied to have its service project (elementary guidance counselors) included in all schools through the general school budget. The national school lunch program has its roots with the PTA, she says, because "way back when, mothers literally brought soup and cocoa into the schools."

Nationally, the PTA has three major projects: to eliminate violence on television; to introduce parent education in the schools; and to promote

better public awareness and understanding of the collective bargaining process and its impact on education. At the local level, the PTA hopes to promote better coordination among groups in individual schools. A resolution proposed at the 1977 national convention supports federal legislation to permit existing organizations in the schools (like the PTA) to act as the advisory group for federally-mandated programs. "The states are finding such a proliferation of advisory groups," she explains, "that some are very ineffective."

What About Teachers?

Some teacher associations have advocated pulling out of the PTA. Task Force '74, a national group working for high school reform, recommends that the PTA become a parents-only organization, with the initials to mean Parents Taking Action. Baisinger expresses opposition to the concept of a PTA without teachers. "Parents and teachers can be very influential when working together," she says. Although some PTAs have differed with teacher groups over collective bargaining, Baisinger says there are many other concerns parents and teachers share. She notes that the PTA national platform calls for protection of retirement rights for teachers. "In any organization, you're not going to get 100% support," she says, "but there are trade-offs." Noting that parents in the organization's 33,000 chapters are the ones who vote to approve bond issues and mill levies, Baisinger says, "Teachers can't get raises if there's no money."

Chapter 6.

More Than Advice: Crucial Issues in Community Involvement

Without some sense of control over their lives, citizens become apathetic, cynical and alienated.

Don Davies,
Schools Where Parents
Make a Difference

The concept of community involvement, expressed simply, attempts to bring decision making to a level as close as possible to the people affected by those decisions. In many large urban districts, the central school board represents so many children that board members become isolated and cannot possibly know the needs of all of them. Several school systems have attempted to cope with this problem through decentralization. In some cases, decentralization has created area superintendents; in others, community school boards. Most have included local school councils to give representation as close to the classroom as is possible.

The realities of many decentralizations have disillusioned some of their early supporters, who say local school councils are merely sounding boards which have no decision-making powers. Other critics charge that community school boards are populated with politically motivated power seekers who have brought the spoils system and financial corruption to the schools. The decentralization concept is a sound one, but it should be developed slowly and with adequate safeguards.

One problem is that the success of local school councils often hinges on the attitude of the principal, who may feel threatened by the thought of sharing power. In fact, community groups have learned that the principal's power is usually enhanced, because the community—not

just one school administrator—backs the recommendations. Don Davies of IRE says school boards and superintendents can foster community involvement by "promoting and rewarding principals who take risks."

Community Control

The concept of community control, like decentralization, is based on the idea that decisions should be made at the level where they will be implemented. Community control has been more successful, because the problem has been attacked on a smaller, more manageable scale.

The Morgan Community School in Washington, D.C., has been run fairly autonomously since 1967 with a 15-member elected board. The school gets a lump sum of money from the central city school board and determines its own spending priorities. The board "has substantial control over curriculum planning and extracurricular activities," says Susan Jacoby in *Learning* magazine, "but naturally can do nothing that violates legally determined policies of the central board, including the system's contract with the Washington Teachers Union."

The school is not without problems. Standardized test scores do not show great improvements, and there are disagreements between conservative board members and progressive teachers over teaching styles. But community control has lowered the adult-pupil ratio to 1 to 10 by using paid community interns. The *Learning* article concluded with a quote by Hilda Mason, a former administrator at the community school: "The education at Morgan is unquestionably better than before community control. And Morgan is ahead of every other school in terms of local management—which I firmly believe is the key to improving schools."

Collective Bargaining

Collective bargaining is becoming the dominant means of establishing teacher contracts in the schools. Each year the discussions widen, as more and more working conditions become part of the agreements. Many working conditions—like class size—can affect educational policy without giving parents any input. Because each school district has limited resources, gains won at the bargaining table can foreclose other options that may be important to parents. For these reasons, and because the number of teacher strikes continues to increase, more and more citizens are seeking access to the collective bargaining process. Proposals for such access range from requests for information about board plans to the "radical" suggestion that parents and citizens be repre-

sented as a third party at the bargaining table.

Some states have passed laws to open collective bargaining to the public. The Florida "sunshine law" permits parents and students to attend negotiations as observers. A similar law in Minnesota opens negotiations to the public. A California measure requires school boards to present their bargaining proposals at a public meeting and allow time for public comment and reaction. The board must adopt their bargaining position at a later public meeting.

The Institute for Responsive Education (IRE) is studying public access to collective bargaining in a two-year "action-research" project in cooperation with two League of Women Voters chapters in California and the Public Education Assn. in New York City. Researchers at IRE have proposed several alternative models for increasing citizen involvement in the collective bargaining process. They are:

- **A more responsive board.** Communication between the school board and its constituents would be increased—either through open hearings, surveys to determine priorities, or feedback on board proposals from advisory groups or school councils.

- **Multilevel bargaining.** A master contract would be negotiated at the district level for salaries and fringe benefits, and other issues would be negotiated at the school level.

- **Multiparty bargaining.** One or several persons representing community interests would sit as a party to the negotiating process.

- **Limited scope bargaining.** Collective bargaining would primarily determine wages and fringe benefits. Broader policy issues would be "off limits."

- **Ombudsman.** A negotiator to represent the public could be hired by a coalition of citizens groups or could be paid by the state.

- **Public hearing.** Representatives of the union and the school board would present their proposals and receive responses from the community in a structured setting.

Representatives of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the National Education Assn. (NEA), and the National School Boards Assn. (NSBA) were contacted for their reactions to the IRE proposals.

The three were uniformly receptive to a freer exchange of opinions and ideas on negotiating proposals—as long as discussions were kept "general." They were less enthusiastic to the "sunshine" approach,

and were adamantly opposed to the concept of multiparty negotiations. Eugenia Kemble of AFT and John Dunlop of NEA both said their affiliates would welcome the opportunity to sit down with community groups to discuss problems and issues that could become bargaining points. Using class size as an example, Dunlop said he knew of no local leader who would not be willing to discuss the issues in terms of their implications for teachers and their impact on students. "NEA would resist discussing detailed proposals," he added, like average class size or the grade levels involved. Similarly, August Steinhilber of NSBA said his organization supported the concept of open meetings and advisory committees to get citizen comments on "general issues," but opposed broadening the bargaining table to include another group.

Two key objections to multiparty bargaining were: (1) there would be no guarantee that the third party would be truly representative of the community; and (2) the third party would not be legally bound by the terms of the contract. The three education groups also rejected the ombudsman concept—stating that the school board represents the community's point of view and a third party would only undercut the board's authority.

Opinion was divided on the proposal for multilevel bargaining. Steinhilber said multilevel bargaining "might work in some circumstances," like in big cities. Kemble said the idea was absurd because it "put a principal in charge of things he or she has no control over." Dunlop opposed multilevel bargaining, saying the major issues are so intertwined that separating negotiations would not be feasible. "When you fragment the process," he added, "you lose the sense of who's responsible. Fragmenting would promote instability and disharmony."

Labor and management were similarly divided on limited scope bargaining. Steinhilber said most state NSBA affiliates "are fighting to limit negotiations solely to personal economic issues." He said the National Labor Relations Act, which excludes public employes, defines the scope of bargaining in "far narrower" terms than some state laws. On the other side, the NEA is "diametrically opposed" to a limited approach to bargaining that excludes policy issues. Dunlop said teachers are more sympathetic to the school district's problems when they can share in making decisions to deal with those problems.

Charles Cheng of IRE acknowledged that the multiparty bargaining model has some "thorny problems," but he insisted the problems are not insurmountable. He said a legal statute could mandate the participation of a third party, and local agreements could contain provisions to hold parents or students accountable. "I would advocate making parents accountable," Cheng said. He added that the multiparty proposal was the most radical approach, and is "a long way from becoming reality."

He said the issue of representation is also a legitimate problem, which

Preliminary Proposals Aren't Big News

John Dunlop, manager of collective bargaining negotiations for NEA, lays at least part of the blame for the teacher union's secrecy to a lack of aggressiveness on the part of education reporters. Local NEA units survey teachers about the problems that exist, and, after proposals are developed, they are "broadcast relatively broadly" to the teachers, he says. "Many hometown newspapers report on those developments. There is nothing to prevent an enterprising reporter from getting our newsletters." And the initial proposals are usually "not all that big news," he commented. Dunlop suggested that one way to open up the process would be for citizens "to insist that newspapers cover the educational scene with more determination and effort than they have in the past."

can be solved by local districts through a formalized selection process. The citizen representatives could be elected by delegates from local and regional advisory groups or selected by an outside party who reviews the qualifications of the volunteers. Cheng, who was a labor negotiator for seven years, said no plan would be "foolproof" but that the benefits of broader representation outweigh the drawbacks.

Cheng advocates including the community in collective bargaining because he "categorically rejects the notion that school boards are representative of the people. Study after study has shown—at least until the late 1960s—that school boards were white, male, business-oriented, real estate types," he said. "Even when they are representative, the boards are far removed from the bargaining arena and are swamped with work, which puts them at the mercy of the experts" (the negotiators hired by the board). He contends that board participation in the process is usually limited to deciding whether to ratify or reject the final agreement.

Can It Be Counter-Productive?

Community involvement is a lot like medicine—in the right quantity, it can be very beneficial, but in overdoses it can be fatal. Advisory committees can sometimes be "too much of a good thing." That is the opinion of David Staver, administrative assistant to the superintendent of the Monroe County Schools in Bloomington, Ind. Although Staver

supports community involvement, he warns that committees formed without specific purposes "begin to look around for something to do" and can wind up running a school. Advisory committees should be formed selectively, he says, because "doing everything by committee lengthens the time frame for decisions."

Staver says committees do not become counterproductive if they have a specific objective, a time limit and a clear understanding of the limits of their power. As an example, he says district textbook committees, which include 40% parents, have worked "extremely well" in selecting textbooks and textbook policies for the Monroe County School. But the committee would become counterproductive if it started picking instructional material for a single classroom because "that would amount to censorship."

Staver says he would like to see some research into the process to help pinpoint the "fine line" between effective involvement and counterproductivity. Even in committees where both educators and the public are committed to the process, communication can break down—with the educators becoming defensive and the citizens becoming hostile, he says.

The key to effective involvement is that it should be structured and all sides should be willing to listen. "Too much of the time we espouse human relations and public relations," Staver said, "and when it comes down to the nitty-gritty—like the way we answer the phone or the signs we put up—we don't perform."

Where Do We Go From Here?

Community involvement seems to be a concept that everyone believes in, but that many do not support in actual practice. Some educators pay lip service to the idea and then structure the process so that failure is inevitable. One such procedure is to create an advisory committee to discuss an issue when the final decision has already been made. Another way to stifle involvement is to withhold vital information or to call for complex decisions in an unreasonably short period of time.

For educators who are sincere about involving the community, Don Davies, in an article in *The National Elementary Principal*, outlines four broad goals: decentralization, collaboration, nurture and state leadership. Recognizing the problems and pitfalls which have occurred with decentralization, Davies says a sensible plan of checks and balances should be developed, spelling out the roles and responsibilities of the schools, the district, the state and federal government, and of students, parents, teachers, administrators, employe organizations and school boards. "Such plans will vary from place to place," he adds, "and

should be developed with the full participation of those affected."

Collaboration is a skill which must be learned. Davies describes it as a "give and take among school people and citizens, which leads to shared decision-making, shared authority and wise exchanges of professional and community expertise and resources."

State leadership for community involvement should be "positive and facilitating, but not controlling," Davies says. State legislatures and departments of education can provide "financial incentives and technical assistance to districts wishing to decentralize and to develop school councils." And the funds and technical expertise can also help "develop imaginative approaches to school-community collaboration."

The solutions and approaches to community involvement must be locally developed and locally administered to be really effective. The fundamental purpose of community involvement is to involve individuals in decisions which affect their lives. A single, national model for involvement—imposed externally—would undermine the very purpose it sought to fulfill.

The National Elementary Principal article concluded, "Think small. And think first and foremost about healthy, self-governing communities served by responsive and diverse institutions that are good places for children and other growing people and things. If that's not what citizen participation is really all about, then it's not worth all the fuss and effort anyway."

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

Publications

Focus: Seven Steps to Community Involvement in Educational Problem Solving
(By Larry Winecoff and Conrad Powell)
Pendell Publishing Co.
PO Box 1666W
Midland, Mich. 48640

Organizing School Volunteer Programs
(By Barbara Carter and Gloria Dapper)
Citation Press
50 W. 44th St.
New York, N.Y. 10036

Phi Delta Kappa Educational Goals and Objectives Model
Phi Delta Kappa
8th and Union Sts.
PO Box 789
Bloomington, Ind. 47401

Right to Read Tutors Handbook
National Reading Center
1776 Massachusetts Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20036

The School Budget Is Your Business
(By Rhoda Dersh)
Public School Budget Study Project
1500 Alsace Rd.
Reading, Pa. 19604

Volunteers in Education: A Handbook for Coordinators of Volunteer Programs
Supt. of Documents
U.S. Govt. Printing Office
Washington, D.C. 20402
Order No. 1975—601-983-45

Organizations

National Committee for Citizens in Education
Suite 410
Wilde Lake Village Green
Columbia, Md. 21044
Toll free telephone: (800) 638-9675

Institute for Responsive Education
704 Commonweath Ave.
Boston, Mass. 02215
(617) 353-3309

National School Volunteer Program
300 N. Washington St.
Alexandria, Va. 22314
(703) 836-4880

National Community Education Assn.
1017 Avon St.
Flint, Mich.
(313) 234-1634

National Coalition of Title I Parents
Suite 718
1010 Vermont Ave. NW
Washington D.C. 20005
(202) 638-5466

Center for the Study of Parent Involvement
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